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Seventy-first year

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Monday, 21 March 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Chikoti	(Angola)
Members:	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Ybañez
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Duddridge
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Rossselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

Maintenance of international peace and security

Prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region

Note verbale dated 8 March 2016 from the Permanent Mission of Angola to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2016/223)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2016/232)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Maintenance of international peace and security

Prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region

Note verbale dated 8 March 2016 from the Permanent Mission of Angola to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2016/223)

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region (S/2016/232)

The President: I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, Ministers and other representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Albania, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Kazakhstan, Morocco, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Rwanda, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland and Thailand to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedures, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Said Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region of Africa, Mr. Smail Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, and Mr. Vijay Pillai, Adviser in the Office of the Vice-President of the African region of the World Bank.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following to participate in this meeting: Mr. Koen Vervaeke, Managing Director for Africa of the European External Action Service of the European Union; and Mr. Pascal Couchepin Roger, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region of the International Organization of la Francophonie.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/223, which contains a note verbale dated 8 March 2016 from the Permanent Mission of Angola addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept paper on the item under consideration.

I also wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/232, containing the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

I further wish to draw the attention of Council members to the letter dated 17 March 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, which conveys the United Nations Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework 2016-2017. This letter will be issued as a document of the Council, in the coming days, under the symbol S/2016/255.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: I am pleased to join the Security Council today for this important and timely debate on the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region. I thank Angola, as President of the Security Council and Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, for organizing this meeting.

Significant advances have been made over the past 16 years since the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was first deployed to that country. These include the withdrawal of foreign armed forces, the reunification of the country, the establishment of a transitional Government, the organization of two national elections, and the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region in February 2013.

The past several years have also seen some progress in stabilizing the security situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The defeat of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) and the successful conclusion of the Kampala dialogue in December 2013 have helped to improve the region's security situation. Nonetheless, major peace and security challenges persist in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, and require our continued attention. Sustained efforts are required to neutralize all negative forces, including by finding sustainable solutions for former combatants and extending State authority into areas reclaimed from armed groups. In this regard, I have welcomed the decision of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to resume joint military planning and operations with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to eliminate negative forces, notably the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda and the Allied Democratic Forces.

I urge participants in today's debate to agree on tangible recommendations to accelerate the disarmament and demobilization of all armed groups still operating in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also call on the members of the Security Council to reach out to relevant actors and to support our efforts to fully implement the Nairobi Declarations, which ended the M-23 insurgency. There is no doubt that eliminating negative forces will be more challenging if these forces continue to harvest and trade in natural resources from the region.

The illegal exploitation and trade in natural resources is worth billions of dollars. It is urgent that these economic lifelines be cut. I am therefore encouraged that my Special Envoy is working with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region to help improve the governance of natural resources. I call on the Governments of the Great Lakes region to formulate sound strategies to turn their States' natural resources into powerful drivers of human and economic development.

I am worried about continued violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and other parts of the region. In addition to the violence perpetrated by the many armed groups operating in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the past months have seen a sharp increase in intercommunal and inter-ethnic conflicts. This is an alarming trend that requires our urgent attention. Attending to the needs of the most vulnerable people in conflict-affected areas is a key component of the United Nations strategy to promote sustainable peace and security in the Great Lakes region. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone, 7.5 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance, including more than 1.5 million internally displaced persons. Due to the threat posed by armed groups, population displacements and human rights violations occur on a daily basis in some parts of the country. As the Democratic Republic of the Congo enters a delicate electoral period, we are concerned about the risk of election-related violence, which could worsen an already grave humanitarian situation.

The rapidly deteriorating security situation in Burundi is also of concern. More than 1 million people, including some 25,000 internally displaced persons, are in need of assistance in Burundi. In addition, some 250,000 Burundian refugees are being hosted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. I commend Member States for their hospitality in receiving refugees from neighbouring countries. I also remind Member States of their international and moral obligation to protect and provide asylum to refugees. Under no circumstance should States use refugees for political purposes. It is also our shared responsibility to prevent the militarization of refugee settlements, which must retain their civilian character.

(*spoke in French*)

I am also very concerned about the continuing impasse in organizing the upcoming elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo. During my recent visit to the country, in February, I urged all stakeholders to resolve their differences through dialogue and to create conditions conducive to the holding of timely and credible elections, in accordance with the Constitution. In the past, political crises in the Great Lakes region have led to widespread violence and serious security problems. We must prevent such a scenario from materializing. I ask the Security Council and the leaders of the region to help us to maintain political stability in the Democratic Republic of Congo by quickly finding a solution to the current impasse.

(*spoke in English*)

While we often focus on political, security and humanitarian issues as we discuss conflict prevention and resolution, we should remind ourselves that peace and security go hand-in-hand with human and economic development. That is why I am very pleased with the success of the Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference held in Kinshasa in February. The Conference gave Great Lakes leaders a rare opportunity to engage with private investors and business leaders from around the world to discuss how to improve the business and investment climate in the region. I am particularly pleased with the Conference's recommendation that private investors should support business ventures that promote livelihoods for women and youth, with a special emphasis on capacity-building and skills-development.

Finally, today's meeting marks the official launch of the United Nations Regional Strategic Framework, which seeks to better align the work of the United Nations in the Great Lakes region with the objectives of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. The Strategic Framework has six pillars, namely, sustainable natural-resource management, economic integration, cross-border trade and food nutrition security, mobility, youth and adolescents, gender and sexual and gender-based violence, and justice and conflict prevention. Progress in implementing the strategic framework will greatly contribute to sustainable peace and development in the region. I call on the Security Council, the States of the Great Lakes region and the donor community to endorse the strategic framework and extend their full support to its implementation.

(*spoke in French*)

Let us work together to bring stability, dignity and opportunities for the future for the peoples of the Great Lakes region.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Djinnit.

Mr. Djinnit (*spoke in French*): I thank the Angolan presidency for its initiative to hold this open debate on peace and security in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Along with the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes region is among the areas of the African continent that has been most affected by conflict and instability. Yet lasting peace in Africa seems to hinge on stabilizing this vast, pivotal region of the continent. And it must be said that the region does not lack assets to become a zone of prosperity and stability on the continent.

Since the conflicts and political upheavals of the 1990s, the region has made significant progress in terms of political stability and development. Some countries have recorded impressive economic growth rates, with obvious repercussions on the living conditions of the population — even if it is regrettable that all segments of society do not benefit equally. Ambitious and promising integration and economic and social development cooperation initiatives have been launched, such as the various development corridors linking landlocked countries to countries with coastlines. Furthermore, countries in the region are engaged in economic, democratic and political reform processes, with varying levels of success.

Following the conflicts of the 1990s, and with the support of the United Nations and the African Union, the region entered into the Pact on Security, Stability and Development, which emerged from the International Conferences on Great Lakes Region held in Dar es Salaam in 2004 and Nairobi in 2006. The Pact aimed at sealing the hard-won peace and at consolidating the gains of the 1993 Arusha Accords on Rwanda and the 2000 agreements on Burundi, as well as the Lusaka peace process and the outcomes of the inter-Congolese dialogue held in Sun City in 2002. In February 2013, the countries of the region came together under the auspices of the United Nations, the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Community to make specific commitments in line with the Addis Ababa framework agreement in order to halt the wave of instability that threatened the peace in the region following the capture of Goma by the Mouvement du 23 Mars (M-23) rebel group, which was eventually militarily defeated.

Therefore, this meeting of the Security Council is timely to assess the progress made and the challenges still to be overcome on the way to the consolidation of peace, conflict prevention and stabilization of the region. Council deliberations will certainly touch both on current issues that are a source of immediate concern as well as on the root causes of instability in the Great Lakes region. It must be emphasized that those two levels of the Council's concerns are at the heart of the mandate and the road map of my Office.

(*spoke in English*)

Over the past few years, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the countries of the region as a whole have made encouraging progress towards implementing the commitments under the Pact and the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. However, there is still a long way to go to achieve long-term stability and development in the area. Despite the efforts deployed thus far to eradicate negative force in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, those armed groups — including the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), the Allied Democratic Forces and other Mai Mai groups — continue to kill innocent people, commit serious human rights violations, engage in illegal exploitation of natural resources and contribute to perpetuating mistrust in the area. In that regard, I would like to commend the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for recent decision to authorize the resumption of cooperation between its armed forces and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with a view to neutralizing the FDLR and other negative forces operating in the eastern part of the country. We look forward to the early operationalization of that decision.

Little progress has been achieved so far in the repatriation of the former M-23 combatants from Uganda and Rwanda and in the implementation of the Nairobi Declarations. Delays in implementing the latter and in the repatriation process are sources of serious concern. Disturbing reports in recent weeks have alluded to the return of several former M-23 combatants to Masisi, outside the framework of the Nairobi Declarations. As a follow up to a decision of the Regional Oversight Mechanism and the Addis Ababa ministerial meeting of 28 January, the guarantors of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework are expected to visit Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo soon to engage the relevant stakeholders on the best ways and means to address obstacles that impede the full and effective implementation of the Nairobi Declarations and the repatriation process.

While significant progress has been achieved in consolidating democracy in the region, as seen in the holding of peaceful elections in several countries, those achievements remain fragile. Issues relating to respect for the Constitution and electoral processes remain very divisive and generate tensions, as is the case in Burundi, where the crisis reached unacceptable levels of violence, with attendant human rights abuses and implications for regional cohesion and cooperation. I wish to commend the renewed efforts of the leaders of the region to strengthen the East African Community mediation under President Museveni, through the appointment of former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa as the new facilitator. I reiterate our collective call for the speedy resumption of an inclusive dialogue process. I also take this opportunity to call for genuine dialogue to prevail among national stakeholders in the region and for the strengthening of elections governance and democratic institutions as effective tools for conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Durable solutions for the maintenance of international peace and for conflict prevention and resolution in the Great Lakes region must include social and economic strategies that tackle poverty, create jobs, especially for youth, and foster economic integration and shared prosperity within and among countries of the region. I am pleased to report that, as part of the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, adopted by the leaders of the signatory countries of the Addis Ababa Agreement, my Office organized, jointly with the ICGLR secretariat, the Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference in Kinshasa on 24 and 25 February. More than 500 participants, including representatives of the private sector, Governments, development partners and experts from all over the world, attended the Conference, which generated passionate and constructive discussions on the need to improve the business climate in the region and promote responsible investments. I thank the Secretary-General, who attended the opening ceremony together with President Kabila and other leaders from the region, for his support for that initiative.

The Conference generated a lot of expectations and hope. We intend to build on the momentum that the Conference has created in order to ensure that the great economic potentials of the region for durable development and peace are fully realized. My Office will work closely with ICGLR to support the Great Lakes Region Private Sector Forum, which was established in the course of the preparation process for the Conference to serve as a permanent mechanism to promote investments in the region.

The illegal exploitation of natural resources remains a critical driver of conflicts and a key factor in the proliferation of criminal networks that undermine peace and security in the region. That is an issue that requires collective and decisive actions. As a follow-up to the Kinshasa Conference, where the issue of natural resources featured prominently, and as I suggested during the Development Partners Ministerial Forum in Addis Ababa on 12 July last year, my Office will continue to consult on the idea of convening a forum to review the progress in initiatives taken by various national, regional and international stakeholders with regard to the responsible exploitation of natural resources in the Great Lakes region. The proposed forum will seek to offer a fresh and comprehensive look at the issues involved. The debate should also include urgent measures that need to be taken with the support of the Security Council to improve natural resources governance and cut off the economic lifelines of armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, as those groups continue to benefit from the illegal exploitation of resources, such as gold and charcoal, while taking advantage of vulnerable persons, including women and children.

The region will not enjoy long-term peace and stability if the culture of impunity prevails and individuals are not held accountable for the crimes they have committed. My Office has been working with the ICGLR Executive Secretariat and other partners to support initiatives aimed at promoting judicial cooperation among the countries of the region, particularly in relation to gender and sexual-based violence. I wish to take this opportunity to commend the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for its recent decision to transfer Ladislas Ntaganzwa, a suspect in the 1994 Rwanda genocide, to the Residual Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals, in compliance with an order issued by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda calling for his transfer to Rwanda.

The refugee and humanitarian situation resulting from the influx of more 250,000 refugees from Burundi to neighbouring States remains a matter of the utmost concern. Recognizing that durable solutions will require efforts on the part of political, humanitarian and development partners, my Office is working with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Bank and other partners to bring together key national counterparts and international partners to look into creating new models that can promote dignity and better opportunities for displaced persons and increase the benefits for host communities.

In an effort to promote the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, we have also continued to engage with civil society, including through supporting a series of national civil-society consultations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda and assisting in the convening of the second General Assembly meeting of the ICGLR Regional Civil Society Forum in Dar es Salaam.

The Women's Platform for the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, which was established by my predecessor, continues to remain a catalytic instrument for women's empowerment in the region. Over the past two years, my Office has supported a number of grass-roots women's organizations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. I wish to thank the Governments of the Netherlands, Norway, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Belgium, as well as the Oak Foundation, for their contribution to the Trust Fund in Support of the Activities of the Secretary-General's Special Representative to the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa, which supported both the Women's Platform and other activities, including the Private Sector Conference. Equally, my Office has supported various activities to engage and empower youth in the region in line with regional initiatives, especially the ICGLR Special Summit on the fight against youth unemployment in Nairobi in 2014. We will continue to work with civil society in general, and with women's and youth networks, as well as with the recently established Great Lakes Private Sector Forum, and support their active contribution to the ongoing efforts for economic and political development in the region.

Finally, I would like to invite the Council to give its blessing to the United Nations Great Lakes Region Strategic Framework, which was developed jointly by my Office and the United Nations country teams in the region in support of the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and the development of the region. The Strategic Framework represents the culmination of a process launched by the Secretary-General during his joint mission with the World Bank President to the Great Lakes region in May 2013. The Framework is not only a key tool fir addressing the root causes of conflicts in the region, but also represents a collective and coordinated platform for partnership between United Nations entities working in the Great Lakes region, international partners and Member States for effective solutions for conflict prevention and resolution, and for the attainment of durable peace, as envisaged in the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. I thank the Council for accepting that the United Nations Great Lakes Region Strategic Framework be formally launched on the occasion of this open debate.

(*spoke in French*)

Like other parts of the African continent, the Great Lakes region is at a crossroads. Praiseworthy efforts are being made by its leaders and peoples to leave behind the instability that it has faced for a long time now and to lay the foundation for sustainable development and peace. As with any transition period, it is still vulnerable to relapses, and it is therefore imperative that the gains of peace and democracy in the region be consolidated. In that regard, I can only encourage the Council to continue to pay attention to the region and to invite the international community to continue to do the same.

The President: I thank Mr. Djinnit for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Chergui.

Mr. Chergui (*spoke in French*): At the outset, on behalf of the presidency of the Commission of the African Union, allow me to express the deep gratitude of the African Union to Angola, which holds the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March 2016, for scheduling this debate on the Great Lakes region. I would like to thank the Angolan presidency for the opportunity to address the Council.

I would also like to take this opportunity to once again express the gratitude of the African Union to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his personal commitment to Africa, as well as for his unstinting support, not only to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, signed in Addis Ababa on 24 February 2013, but more generally for the initiatives he has taken in favour of peace, stability and prosperity in the Greak Lakes region. His loyalty to the principles and founding goals of the United Nations naturally led him most recently to the Western Sahara in order to provide the necessary impetus to the peace process so that we can finally achieve the objective for which the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara was established, namely, the organization of a referendum on self-determination for the Saharan people.

That was also the reason behind the Secretary-General's recent visit to Burundi and to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the month of February in the context of the extension of the mission of Security Council members from 21 to 22 January in Bujumbura. The Secretary-General's visit to Burundi on 25 and 26 February was followed by a high-level delegation made up of five Heads of State and Government of the African Union within the framework of supporting the country to emerge from the spiral of violence that had enveloped it since April 2015. That visit also underscores the unanimous vision and the complementarity of action between the African Union and the United Nations when it comes to Burundi.

The Great Lakes region faces numerous security and humanitarian challenges that are mainly linked to the results of the activities of the negative forces operating in the region. They have taken the development of the region as hostage and encouraged the illegal trafficking of natural resources, thus adding to the poverty of the population and preventing development, which is unsustainable. However, thanks to the efforts of the countries of the region, supported by bilateral and multilateral partners, significant progress has been made, namely, since the signing of the Peace, Security and Coooperation Agreement. The most outstanding progress is the neutralization of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), the signing of the Nairobi Declarations, on 12 December 2014, as well as the organization of the Private Sector Investment Conference for the Great Lakes Region held in Kinshasha on 24 and 25 February.

In that regard, we also welcome the resumption of cooperation between the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on joint military operations against the Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and the other negative forces that are present in the eastern part of the country. Council members will remember that the Heads of State of the region had encouraged the resumption of that cooperation during the sixth meeting of the follow-up mechanism of the Framework Agreement, which was held here in New York on 29 September 2015.

In that regard, we must also congratulate the co-guarantor organizations of the Framework Agreement — the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the African Union and the United Nations, as well as the two co-chairs of the Technical Support Committee — for their efforts in implementing the Framework Agreement. I would like to encourage the planned visit by the co-guarantors to Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda from 11-25 April, as well as the evaluation mission of the members of the Support Committee to Goma during the same time period. Both those visits would be a part of the decisions that emerged from the second ministerial retreat of Member States and the guarantors of the Framework Agreement, which was held on 28 January in Addis Ababa.

I hope that those initiatives will help us to identify possible solutions to questions linked to the repatriation of ex-combatants of the M-23 cantoned in Rwanda and Uganda, the repatriation of the FDLR cantoned in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the neutralization of the combatants of the FDLR.

The latest political developments in the Central African Republic are a reason for hope for the African Union and the United Nations, which have spared no effort for the return of stability to that country. That is why I would like to congratulate the transitional authorities for the sound holding of the elections that led to the election of a new democratically elected President as head of the country.

On South Sudan, the signing of the agreement on security arrangements on 3 November 2015 will make it possible to implement the peace agreement signed in August 2015 under the facilitation of Intergovernmental Authority on Development between President Salva Kiir Mayardit and Mr. Riek Machar. I would like to renew our support for the security measures under way to finalize the return of the First Vice-President to Juba, as well as the setting up of a transitional Government. I hope that the return of Mr. Machar to Juba is a matter of days, not of weeks.

The African Union, through its High Representative, President Alpha Oumar Konaré, is continuing its mission to support the peace process under way. I would like to renew the unreserved support of the African Union for the efforts of President Mogae as head of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Mission of the Peace Agreement on South Sudan in order to establish peace and to promote both parties' full respect for the ceasefire. That would prevent a worsening of a humanitarian situation, one that is already disturbing, at a time when a large part of the region is experiencing a serious drought and is facing an acute food crisis.

The African Union remains concerned by the security and humanitarian situation in Burundi, where a durable solution would be the holding of an inclusive dialogue, under the facilitation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), without preconditions, among all the actors in the crisis. In that regard, I am pleased by the ECOWAS appointment of Mr. Benjamin Mkpa as the new facilitator for the Burundi crisis. Mr. Mkapa has just conducted a consultation mission to Bujumbura, Rwanda and Uganda with a view to holding this dialogue as soon as possible.

The African Union, like the United Nations, is committed to providing its entire support to the mediation team in order to provide every opportunity to that dialogue. At the same time, the African Union continues its operation to deploy 200 human rights observers, as well as military experts, approved by the Government of Burundi and the Peace and Security Council of our organization in order to support the dialogue and also to restore a secure environment in the country where human rights and freedom of expression are respected. The very high number of refugees, as well as displaced persons, must also command our full attention.

Given the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as the constitutional time line is approaching for the holding of presidential elections, the African Union remains alongside the Democratic Republic of the Congo and intends to support it in every effort to hold inclusive, peaceful, credible, free, just and transparent elections. I welcome the support of the United Nations, as well as of the entire international community, to the efforts of the facilitator of the African Union, Mr. Mkojo, with a view to holding a political dialogue with the Congolese stakeholders to find solutions with regard to the electoral time line, as well as the actual holding of elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in peace and unity.

I cannot conclude without recalling the need for greater promotion of the rights of children and women in the region. Any type of violence against women must stop immediately. And the inclusion of women in conflict prevention, in conflict resolution and in reconstruction is not an act of charity, but rather an investment in a society that would be fair, inclusive and respectful of the rights of everyone and in harmony with the eternal values of Africa.

Finally, I hope the Kinshasa Investment Conference will send a decisive signal on support for cooperation, development and solidarity in combating the ideology of hatred, suspicion and recurring crises in the Great Lakes region.

The President: I thank Mr. Chergui for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Pillai.

Mr. Pillai: It is an honour to be in the Security Council today for this important meeting on the Great Lakes region, and I thank the Angolan presidency for organizing it.

It has been three years since 11 nations signed the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Since then, there has been progress but, as speakers before me have highlighted, significant challenges remain. Today's meeting is a good opportunity to renew international support for delivering on the fine principles and commitments laid out in the Framework Agreement. On behalf of the World Bank, I would like to make three points.

First, the Great Lakes region presents a stark example of the economic and human costs of conflict. As we all know, the drivers of that conflict are deep-seated — weak institutions, a lack of access to basic services and economic opportunity, an uncertain security situation and ethnic divisions, all compounded by rapid population growth and competition over natural resources. We continue to see examples in the Great Lakes of how a lack of peace and stability plays through very quickly in terms of macroeconomic instability, rising fiscal deficits and reduced investor appetite, which further fuel the lack of jobs and access to basic services.

As a development institution, the World Bank is acutely aware that peace and stability are essential prerequisites for our support to the region, which is aimed at reducing poverty and expanding opportunities. We emphasize to national and international partners that ensuring peace and stability is an urgent need for the region, for only then can its people reap the full benefits of development cooperation.

Secondly, in 2013 the President of the World Bank and the Secretary-General visited the region, and their message was very clear: the international community is committing development resources to support the objectives of the Framework Agreement. The World Bank Group had committed to providing $1.2 billion in additional resources for regional solutions in the Great Lakes. Today, I am pleased to report that we are well advanced in approving regional projects for the full amount. Over time, those projects will help to tap into regional power-generation opportunities, providing an additional 250 megawatts of power, and will facilitate secure and higher incomes for nearly 100,000 trading communities and small-time traders who currently sustain life through insecure cross-border trading. The projects will help to alleviate the misery of thousands of women who have been sexually abused as a result of the conflict and of people who have suffered the grim consequences of forced displacement.

Those are difficult areas to tackle in any country, and more so in places with weak capacity and uncertain security environments. The World Bank remains committed to working with the Governments involved to ensure that those projects are effectively implemented so that the benefits flow in full for the people of the region, thus creating a path to a virtuous cycle between development benefits that help to further enhance the region's peace and security objectives.

Finally, the Framework Agreement recognizes specific roles for the national Governments and the international community. Each has a role to play. In addition to what is stated under the Framework, all of us — countries, bilaterals and multilateral partners — have a responsibility to act in a coordinated manner. I am delighted that the World Bank has been working well with the United Nations and other development partners and remains committed to sustaining those partnerships for the benefit of the Great Lakes region.

The President: I thank Mr. Pillai for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for External Relations of Angola.

I am honoured to preside over today's debate, and on behalf of the President of the Republic of Angola and Chair of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, His Excellency José Eduardo dos Santos, I will share with the Council some ideas on the subject under consideration: the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region. I welcome the Secretary-General's presence and participation in this meeting, which is a demonstration of his commitment on an issue that has been the object of his persistent efforts to find solutions to the inextricable conflicts that have plagued the region for too long.

The Great Lakes region faces many challenges and is undergoing great stress. Its high levels of economic growth have not led to broad-based development or tangible improvements in the well-being of its citizens. Poverty, inequality and inequity are commonplace, fuelling social tensions and unrest and shattering social cohesion. Pockets of deadly conflicts persist. Their causes revolve around economic, institutional, regional and global geopolitical factors that have been extremely costly in socioeconomic and human terms, engendering a vicious cycle of violence. The nexus between natural resources and conflict is paramount in formulating adequate responses and mitigation measures. In that regard, the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with one of the greatest concentrations of precious minerals and metals in the world, poses a multidimensional challenge to economic and human development in the affected countries and the region as a whole.

There is a need to put the Great Lakes region back on a path of sustainable development. Strong leadership, political will, working institutions and State-building are key for ensuring the effective participation of citizens and communities in socioeconomic and political choices, for the decentralization of service providers and for transparency in public-sector and finance management.

Sustaining peace is an important objective that must be achieved through open dialogue among all the parties concerned. Angola has been deploying sustained efforts to contribute to that endeavour. The African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the East African Community and other subregional arrangements should provide the required support. A crucial part of that equation is integrity and genuine involvement on the part of all internal stakeholders, combined with commitment by external partners in implementing regional projects, based on a shared, long-term vision and on the expectations of the peoples of the region.

Angola's objective in holding this debate is to shift the traditional narrative, which focuses on armed conflict, the plundering of resources, egregious violations of human rights and a general incapacity to find sustainable solutions to the problems affecting the region. The drivers of conflict are clearly identified. Our aim is to have a forward-looking approach by identifying game changers, thereby permitting the transformation of those drivers of conflict into drivers of peace and social and economic development.

In that connection, we warmly welcome the launching of the Regional Strategic Framework for the Great Lakes Region, in support of the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, which establishes a clear link between peace, security and development and commits to strengthening regional cooperation and deepening regional integration.

The road map set up in the Regional Strategic Framework establishes nine priorities for regional action, which Angola fully shares: efforts to neutralize the negative forces; confidence-building measures; promoting correct electoral processes; strengthening peace and security oversight mechanisms; addressing the issue of Rwandan refugees; promoting socioeconomic development and regional integration; initiatives to mobilize women, youth and civil society; fighting impunity, improving accountability and strengthening the rule of law; and leading and coordinating the international community's support for the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

The eastern region of the African continent, which comprises the Great Lakes region, is one of the fastest-growing economic regions in the world, with a 6.2 per cent growth rate in 2015. A meaningful part of the growth is driven by endogenous and potentially sustainable structural factors, namely, rising demographics, the prominence of youth, a growing middle class with an increasing purchasing power, rapid urbanization and growing infrastructure needs, as well as an expanding intra-Africa trade.

In addition, the Great Lakes region has shown a certain degree of resilience, taking into account that a significant part of the region's exports are linked to commodities subject to falling prices. Moreover, the region is one of the most densely populated areas in Africa, and investments are needed to turn that potentially huge market into a demographic dividend. The Great Lakes region's rich natural endowments — especially mineral and metal resources, water for irrigation and hydroelectric power generation, arable land and population size — are important structural factors on which to base its integrated development. The report of the Economic Commission for Africa, *Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Causes, impact* *and implications for the Great Lakes region*, defines regional integration as a crucial developmental link, seeing such integration as leverage for peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. To realize such potential, the human capital base and infrastructure need to be upgraded, as do the quality and capacity of its institutions, the legal and regulatory frameworks, the levels of transparency and accountability, and the depth of social and political debate, consultation and collaboration.

The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources is one concrete instance of concerted action aimed at such an endeavour, calling for redoubled efforts and extended support to the ICGLR and the Regional Initiative. The Kimberley Process was a landmark initiative in that direction.

The Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference, held in Kinshasa on 24 and 25 February, represents a key milestone in this process, and I am confident that its outcomes will serve as a canvas on which to implement most of the required actions. The Investment Conference indicates that the region is ready to champion a vision of long-lasting peace and prosperity and to welcome responsible and sustainable long-term investments in line with the framework of hope: the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. The Framework emphasizes the importance of shared responsibility, whereby peace, security and socioeconomic progress are the responsibility of all — citizens and institutions within and outside the Great Lakes region. It is therefore our duty to ensure that we deliver on the promises to bring about a brighter future embedded in the outcomes of the Investment Conference.

In his words at the Conference, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged all of us to act when he said,

> "The people of the Great Lakes region count on you ... to fully contribute to the goal of transforming the region ... It is the pathway to peace and stability."

Our key role, as members of the international community, is to ensure that those positive changes are sustained and transformed into permanent gains. I strongly believe that the Great Lakes region has everything required to achieve a new destiny and follow an equitable and sustainable development pathway.

Finally, I hope that I have provided some insights as a contribution to our debate in the Council, and I thank everyone for their kind attention.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank Foreign Minister Chikoti for being here today and for hosting this timely debate on an incredibly important set of issues. Let me also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Commissioner Chergui, Special Envoy Djinnit and Mr. Pillai of the World Bank for their remarks and determined work throughout the Great Lakes region.

The Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference, co-hosted by Special Envoy Djinnit's Office in Kinshasa last month, spoke to the economic and security gains made across the region over the last decade. That progress is tenuous and fragile, and there is still a long way to go. The trajectory over the past several years, however, has clearly been positive.

I would like to use my remarks to underscore the inextricable connection linking democratic accountability, human rights and the rule of law, on the one hand, and economic progress and lasting stability and peace, on the other.

On the very same day that the Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference began, a court in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ruled on the case of six young activists — five men and one woman — who had been charged with attempting to incite civil disobedience. They had been arrested eight days earlier at a private home in Goma at 4.30 in the morning as they prepared banners for a general strike to protest potential election delays. One of the banners read "in 2016 we won the Cup" — in reference to the African nation's soccer championship — "we can also win democracy". They were convicted and sentenced to two years in jail, a term reduced, on appeal, to six months.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is not the only country in the region where civil society is threatened or where democratic processes are being deliberately undermined. This unfortunately has been the accelerating trend in recent months, evident at the top, where leaders make increasingly blatant power grabs to remain in office, and on the streets, where their Governments close media outlets, arrest opposition members, intimidate civil society groups and otherwise squeeze the political space available for competing views. This widening disregard for democratic processes threatens to undermine the political security and development progress achieved over the past two decades, and it imperils the progress still to come. It defies the ability of citizens to freely choose their leaders and hold them accountable. It drives them into the streets or out of the country. It threatens to plunge communities back into the cycle of poverty and violence, from which many are only now beginning to emerge.

Let me speak briefly to the situation in four countries where this trend is most pronounced and where there is still time to change course.

The economic achievements of President Kagami's Rwanda are well known and rightly celebrated. Per capita income has doubled since the year 2000. Rwanda's advances on the Human Development Index are greater than any other country in the world over the past 25 years. It has become a leader in international peacekeeping, in numbers as well as in performance, with its forces admired for their bravery and their commitment to civilian protection. When one reflects on the horrors of the genocide that killed approximately 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu 22 years ago next month, one sees the epic scale of the achievements by President Kagami and by the Rwandan people. The results on the ground for Rwandans are remarkable. Unfortunately, despite Rwanda's progress on economic rights, women's right, and on so many development axes, its record in the protection and promotion of civil and political rights is less impressive. The United States remains deeply committed to its partnership with Rwanda, but the continued absence of political space and the inability of individuals and journalists to discuss political affairs or report on issues of public concern pose a serious risk to Rwanda's future stability. Rwanda can achieve lasting peace and prosperity through a Government centred on the principle of democratic accountability, not one centred on any single individual.

The same applies in Uganda. Uganda is a critical contributor to peace and security, especially through its long-time contribution to the African Union force in Somalia. It is also a generous host to more than 500,000 refugees, providing the right to work and access to social services to refugees and Ugandan citizens alike. However, when it comes to democratic accountability, the run-up and aftermath to last month's elections show real issues. The Government and its security forces detained opposition figures without legal justification, harassed their supporters and intimidated the media. It passed legislation restricting the operations of non-governmental organizations, banning them from acting against the "interests of Uganda". President Museveni's actions contravene the rule of law, jeopardize Uganda's democratic progress and threaten Uganda's future stability and prosperity.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, President Kabila appears to be considering a similar path. His country remains one of the poorest in the world, but it has begun to see gains in democracy, stability and economic growth. In 2014, its economy grew by 9.5 per cent. Yet as President Kabila's term nears its end, that fragile progress hangs in the balance. Continued development depends upon further advances against armed groups and the extension of State authority. And, of course, it depends on free and fair presidential elections in November. There is no credible reason that the Democratic Republic of the Congo's elections would not occur on schedule. The Independent National Electoral Commission said in January that it would need 18 months to update voter rolls. But election experts assure us that it can be done in six months. As the representative of a country that continues to debate its own electoral processes, I recognize that elections are not always perfect, and certainly not always easy, but fidelity to the Constitution — not to mention long-term stability — means that elections must occur on time. Not only must ballots be cast, but individuals must be allowed to campaign for their preferred candidates and express their opinions freely. There is no excuse for the harassment and detention of peaceful activists and opposition leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, like the six activists I mentioned earlier or the 18 other members of the pro-democracy youth movement known as LUCHA, who were detained last Tuesday and held for four days. Their offence was peacefully protesting the Supreme Court's refusal to release two activists, Fred Bauma and Yves Makwambala, who were arrested a year ago and still have yet to receive a trial. It should go without saying that this is not the path to lasting stability. Fred, Yves, the Goma six and all the other young people who have done [illegible]ing more than seek a better future for their country should be released. The Government's attempt to limit its cooperation with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to force a reduction of troops is also concerning. Let us be clear: the Council should not allow peacekeeping missions to become pawns in political games. When Blue Helmets are deployed, they must be allowed to fulfil their mandate, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or any place else.

We need look no further than Burundi to see the dangers of pursuing personal power over the interests of the people. Burundi's economy grew steadily for a decade, but contracted by an estimated 7 per cent last year. President Nkurunziza's decision to stay in office, in defiance of the Arusha Accords, and his crackdown on political opposition have swiftly undone the country's progress of recent years. That is evident in the widespread reports of sexual violence, the more than 400 people who have been killed, the over 250,000 that have fled the country and the even more challenging economic times that, unfortunately, lie ahead. What remains to be seen is whether President Nkurunziza will take decisive action to correct course. Some of his Government's recent commitments are encouraging, but none have yet been matched by meaningful action. Of the 2,000 prisoners he pledged to free, just 158 have been released to date, and only 47 of those were political prisoners. Two of the five radio stations shuttered have been allowed to re-open. But that is just two of the five, and one of those allowed to re-open is pro-Government. We will welcome and support constructive steps when we see them. But rhetoric is not enough.

Let me conclude. The United States has historically been a strong partner of all four of those countries, as it has been for others in the region. Those partnerships are not tied to any particular individual leader, but to the people of those countries. This has been evident in our long-standing aid programmes, our efforts to encourage stability and our commitment to institution-building. It is evident, too, in our strong support for the Public-Private Alliance for Responsible Minerals Trade, which we hope will enable supply-chain solutions that encourage the legitimate trade in natural resources. All four of the leaders I have mentioned today have led their countries through extraordinarily difficult times, but the choices they make now will determine whether their countries' gains are sustained and how they themselves will be remembered decades from now. President Obama told an audience in Ethiopia last year,

> "Sometimes you'll hear leaders say, well, I'm the only person who can hold this nation together. If that's true, then that leader has failed to truly build their nation."

Those nations are ready. If they are given opportunities to fully participate in democratic processes, to hold their leaders accountable, to be subjected to and benefit from the rule of law, they will not merely survive, they will prosper.

The President: I now give the floor to His Exellency Mr. Ignacio Ybañez, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain.

Mr. Ybañez (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by thanking Angola and in particular you, Foreign Minister Chikoti, for the organizing today's open debate, which is of the utmost importance and topicality. I also extend my thanks to the Secretary-General, the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and the representative of the World Bank for their valuable contributions.

A well-known African proverb affirms that when two elephants fight the grass gets hurt. The Great Lakes region continues to experience some of the worst conflicts currently ravaging the African continent. The region has not completed its search for the path of peace, stability and prosperity, and it is the population that is suffering the consequences.

In recent decades, the structural transformation of the Great Lakes has been spectacular. In the 1990s, we witnessed a brutal genocide in Rwanda, followed by a cruel war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2013, we witnessed the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. The distance between those two events is enormous.

But this transformation is not enough. Or put another way, it has not been completed. The region continues to fail to turn the page on conflict. The constant threat of conflict forces us to look further — to try to understand the deeper forces that persist in a region still suffering from instability and violence despite the still-remarkable progress in stabilization and growth in countries such as Rwanda and various regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that context, I want to discuss three challenges that we consider to be priorities, namely, democratic governance, inclusive development and regional cooperation.

The first factor is democratic governance. Every peaceful, stable and prosperous society is built upon a social contract that requires leaders to fulfil their responsibilities and provide services to everyone in the civilian population. The democratic mandate is the best instrument we know to fulfil these objectives and is the expression of a fundamental right, namely, the right to political participation, which makes citizens the architects of their own destiny. The absence of governance leads to a vacuum of responsibility and the inability to provide adequate services to the population. The lack of democracy implies the denial of the rights of individuals.

In the Great Lakes there is a serious problem of lack of democratic governance. Some countries have made progress in the provision of services to its population, but in several of them elections do not end up becoming an instrument of democratic development and social inclusion. Political participation is an essential instrument for empowering citizens. Today it is essential to ensure that this includes women, who have been traditionally excluded in many societies and who are possibly the greatest force for change in the world. Inclusion and respect for legal procedures are conditions to ensure that electoral processes contribute to peace, stability and prosperity.

Constitutions and the legal order as a whole are frameworks for coexistence that no one can overturn, because all citizens are equal before the law. And the leaders must lead by example. It is essential to respect the provisions and limitations of presidential mandates, since the rotation in power is one of the best safeguards of peace and stability. The most worrisome case at the moment is that of Burundi, which I would like to address in greater detail.

Over a year ago, Burundi was poised to be honoured as an example of success in the Great Lakes. It seemed to be a country able to turn the page on violence and instability and begin writing a history of development and prosperity. In April 2015, that illusion began to unravel. Since then, the number of dead has not stopped growing. And there are approximately 240,000 Burundian refugees who have been forced to leave the country. This situation can and must end without any further delay. Spain respects the role of African countries as primarily responsible and interested in the prosperity and stability of their continent and believes that, as emphasized by the Presidents of Africa at the African Union Summit in January, it is urgent to have an inclusive and unconditional political dialogue that fully respects the Arusha Agreement and the Constitution of Burundi and enables the parties to reach a broad and generous agreement on the future they want for the Burundian people.

The second fundamental challenge is to achieve inclusive economic and social development that benefits all citizens of the countries of the region. This challenge is also a non-negotiable obligation, for we cannot go on justifying the tens of millions of people living in poverty, the millions of suffering young people whose outlook on the future is marked by hopelessness and the lack of opportunity, and the millions of women suffering from attacks on their lives and integrity and living excluded from economic and social participation in a region that is extraordinarily rich.

Let us take the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The country has enormous resources of all kinds, valuable deposits of minerals, fertile soil and plentiful water resources — in a world where water and energy are two of the most precious assets. With the support of the international community, the Democratic Republic of the Congo can and should move forward in combating the illegal exploitation of its resources, especially in the eastern part of the country. We must move from armed groups to the generating of tax revenues and from violence and corruption to the construction of schools and hospitals and the creation of decent jobs for young people.

The question now is how to unlock the energies that still prevent the achievement of the future that the people deserve. In part, this question has been answered — through democratic governance. It is crucial for the institutional strength of the State to reach those areas that today remain outside the control of the law. In those places where the State is not present, where the law is not respected, violations of human rights and illegal exploitation of natural resources go hand in hand. The State must return to those regions or newly appear in areas where it could not be found previously. In other words, it is necessary that there be a fair and inclusive electoral process and that constitutional parameters be adjusted. We look forward to the country's upcoming elections. They will be the best way to measure the maturity of the people and institutions of Democratic Republic of the Congo. We have confidence in them.

The third major challenge for the Great Lakes region is developing effective regional cooperation that is able to ensure that the countries of the region come together to achieve a better future and that they share the benefits of prosperity. The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region is the key reference point for all efforts, and its provisions must be fully respected by all its signatories. In particular, it is crucial that no country tolerate or assist any armed group in any way. I would to mention in that regard the recent agreement on the resumption of military cooperation between the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the (Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, which is an excellent development and which, we trust, will soon begin to bear fruit. We must recognize the crucial role played by MONUSCO in helping Congolese society achieve the goals I mentioned earlier. With respect to the repatriation of the former combatants of the Mouvement du 23 mars, we agree with the Secretary-General's encouragement that the countries of the region decisively move forward pursuant to the Nairobi Declarations.

Finally, I would like to express my concern about reports of the recruitment, training and infiltration of a group of Burundian rebels in neighbouring countries for the purposes of carrying out attacks against Burundi. As I said earlier, the situation in Burundi is extremely serious, and the work of the countries of the region is essential to finding a peaceful solution to the crisis. In the past, episodes of mass violence in the Great Lakes region have been closely interconnected, and there is no reason to think that the dynamics have changed today. For humanitarian reasons, but also for self-interest, all countries in the region must make every possible effort to bring an end to this conflict, which casts a dark shadow over the present and the future of the region. The voice of the African Union and its capacity to maintain peace on the continent are extremely important in that respect and must be heard clearly and firmly.

I began my statement by citing an African proverb, and wish to conclude it by quoting another: "In order to cross a bridge you must first reach it." After a few decades of uncertainty, the Great Lakes region has now reached its bridge and has all the capacities it needs to cross it, leaving a past of violence and instability behind it once and for all. The international community's could be of great assistance, but in the final analysis the countries of the region are masters of their own destinies. The challenge is so huge that there is no room for doubt or hesitation, and requires all their energy and commitment. The present moment is highly complex, but the future of peace and stability that we seek for the region is within our reach. Let us move forward.

Mr. Duddridge (United Kingdom): I thank you, Sir, for convening this important and timely debate. I join others in thanking the Secretary-General for his briefing.

Bringing peace to the Great Lakes area has been one of the most difficult challenges faced by the Council. Decades of violence and chaos have left millions dead — millions without hope or, indeed, a home; millions vulnerable to attack from armed groups. The Charter of the United Nations pledges to save successive generations from the scourge of war. In the 70 years since we collectively made that pledge, nowhere has it rung more hollow than in the Great Lakes region.

Nowhere is that more obvious today than in Burundi. When I visited the country in December last year, I heard horrific stories of suffering and abuse. People spoke of torture, disappearances, extradjudicial killings, mass graves and murder, and indiscriminate raids on their homes. I met with health workers who were running out of medicine for sick children, human rights activists living in fear for their lives, and traders who were helpless against the collapse of their economy, which prior to the troubles was doing so well, as we heard earlier. In January, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that extrajudicial killings were increasing, despite the Government's claim that the situation was normal. Evidence of nine mass graves — one of which contained at least 100 bodies — was cited in the same report, again denied by the Burundian Government. And the violence continues today. Abductions and killings are creating a climate of fear. Just last month, Human Rights Watch presented credible evidence of the increasing and worrying use of organized sexual violence.

The United Kingdom is committed to doing everything in its power to seek a peaceful solution to the situation in Burundi. We must not, collectively or individually, repeat the mistakes of the past. We thank the Secretary-General for his leadership and members of the Council for their leadership and active engagement, particularly during their second joint visit to Bujumbura and Burundi earlier this year. We welcome the pledges made by the African Union (AU) and the East African Community to take decisive action to prevent human rights abuses and crimes against humanity more generally in Africa. We in the United Kingdom stand ready to support the AU. We thank Uganda for its constructive participation in this mediation process, and we also welcome the participation of His Excellency Benjamin Mkapa, former President of Tanzania, in these efforts and offer him our strongest support and assistance.

It is right that the international community should play its part. However, let us be clear. Let us be under no misunderstanding. The primary responsibility for this crisis lies with the Burundian Government. The Burundian Government has failed in its fundamental duty to its nation to support the security and safety of its own people. It has within its power the power to change things. Burundi has found a pathway to peace before, and it must do so again. President Nkurunziza must deliver on his promises to the Secretary-General and representatives of the African Union.

The first step is simple. The Government must participate in a fully inclusive dialogue with all parties — not just those whom President Nkurunziza feels happy dealing with. All parties must be included, as peace among just a few is no peace at all. We have learnt time and time again elsewhere in the world that, for peace to endure, communities need to resolve conflict peacefully. The United Kingdom believes genuinely that democratic and accountable governance is the best foundation for stability. That means a frank, lively and uncensored national debate, an active, representative civil society, and a freely operating media. It also means timely and democratic transition of power to maintain lasting stability. Failure to allow that transition puts the progress made across the Great Lakes at risk. We urge all countries of the region to use electoral processes to demonstrate their commitment to peace, stability and accountability.

Today, that is particularly pertinent to the Republic of the Congo, which held elections yesterday following a referendum in which a national debate can be said, sadly, to have been neither frank, lively or uncensored.

Looking across the border, 2016 is a crucial year for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The United Kingdom is a particularly close long-term partner of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we want them to enjoy stability and prosperity. We stand by resolution 2211 (2015). The Democratic Republic of the Congo must hold elections this year, in accordance with its Constitution. With every missed milestone in its democratic journey, the Government loses credibility with the United Kingdom and, I believe, with the Council. It breaks a promise not to us, but to its people, threatening further instability in that already fragile region.

We know that the process is not easy, and we are ready to help. We are ready to help with funding and support for the electoral process. The Council has also offered its full support to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and I expect that to be repeated when the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is renewed later this week. The Democratic Republic of the Congo must make the most of this support, and seize the opportunity to show leadership across the region.

The United Kingdom believes in the enormous potential of the countries and the people of the Great Lakes. That is why we have maintained our strong friendships and support. But their fates are inextricably linked, so their Government must work together if this potential is to be realized. The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, signed by the countries of the region in 2013, offered a comprehensive, joint approach to the region's problems, but not enough has been done to deliver it.

We all know that peace and security are fundamental building blocks for economic growth. Together, they hold the key to unlocking the potential of the people of the region. The Private Sector Investment Conference for the Great Lakes Region of Africa, held in Kinshasa — of which we have heard something earlier in the debate — last month highlighted how poverty fuels conflict in the region. But it also showed that investment, economic growth and job creation can and will build peace. In recognition of that, the United Kingdom recently appointed trade envoys to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

I urge leaders of the region to play their part in bringing peace, making the measures set out in the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework a reality and uniting to make long-term peace and prosperity. As they strive to do so, the people of the Great Lakes region will have the full support of the United Kingdom — and, I hope, of the Council.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): I wish to beging by warmly welcoming and thanking you, Mr. President, and the Angolan presidency for convening today's open debate. We also appreciate the comprehensive concept note (see S/2016/223) circulated, which helps to guide this timely discussion. We welcome and acknowledge the presence and participation of high-level representatives, including ministers and senior Government officials around the table and from countries of the Great Lakes region. My delegation thanks the Secretary-General and all the other briefers for their presentations. We commend their dedication to bring peace and stability to the region and we fully support their ongoing efforts.

Malaysia welcomes the Great Lakes Region Strategic Framework and the road map just presented. We hope that the plans elaborated will galvanize both Member States and regional and international actors in strengthening the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region.

While aligning my delegation by the statement to be delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, Malaysia wishes to emphasize the following with a view to further contribute to the discussion.

First, it is imperative that we bring an end to all armed conflicts in the Great Lakes region. Ending the cycle of violence will require a multi-pronged approach that entails both short- and long-term measures.

Secondly, we must redouble our efforts to neutralize the lingering vestiges of armed groups, which are the main cause of insecurity in the region. We welcome the resumption of cooperation between the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to defeat armed groups operating in the eastern part of the country. We urge the parties to armed conflicts in other parts of the region to disarm and commit to participate in peaceful ways to resolve conflict.

Thirdly, in addition to coordinated military operations, tackling the drivers of conflict — such as the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the illegal exploitation of natural resources — is equally important. Disrupting the sources of income of armed groups is vital in weakening and dismantling them for good. Strengthening regional mechanisms to tackle the illicit flow and promote the sustainable management of natural resources is essential.

Fourthly, the importance of dialogue and respecting peace processes and agreements as part of ending armed conflict and preventing it from recurring cannot be overemphasized.

Fifthly, governance frameworks and the capacity of national institutions must be shored up. In particular, we wish to highlight the importance of security sector reform and of strengthening justice systems and accountability mechanisms to fight impunity, especially for serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law.

In addition to those aspects, serious attention must also be given to the root causes of conflict and violence in the region, in particular poverty. Efforts to improve socioeconomic development in the Great Lakes region are therefore crucial, and should be carried out in tandem with efforts to end violent conflict and strengthen State authority in enforcing the rule of law, justice and accountability. We welcome initiatives, such as last month's Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference, held in Kinshasa and jointly organized by the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, which provide much-needed opportunities for economic cooperation and transformation. We hope that the momentum from the Investment Conference will be sustained through strengthened engagement among Member States, regional organizations and the international community.

On our part, Malaysia remains committed to providing capacity-building training to member States of the Great Lakes region through the Malaysia Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP). To date, approximately 3,000 participants from 13 countries of the region have benefitted from MTCP training in areas such public administration, good governance, health services, education, sustainable development, agriculture, poverty alleviation, investment promotion, information and communications technologies and banking.

The well-being and prosperity of the people of the Great Lakes region must be at the heart of all our efforts. We wish to draw special attention to the children and youth of the region, who have borne the brunt of decades of conflict and who remain vulnerable to grave violations where armed conflict persists in the region. Thousands of children remain among the ranks of armed groups across the region. Securing their release and facilitating their reintegration into their communities must be given importance as part of long-term measures to break the cycle of conflict. We pay tribute to the tireless work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF and national and international partners in advocating for child protection, including the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups and providing much-needed services to children affected by armed conflict. We call on all parties to armed conflict in the Great Lakes region to end and prevent violations and abuses against children, including by adopting and implementing child-protection action plans and commitments in cooperation with the United Nations.

Malaysia also strongly supports efforts to empower youth in the region, including through projects and initiatives outlined in the Regional Strategic Framework. We call on the international community to support those efforts. We believe that the rich dividends in peace and stability for the region will be well-worth the investment in supporting the development of children and youth.

In conclusion, Malaysia believes that this vision of peace, security and stability — shared not just by countries in the region but also by the international community — is achievable through our collective efforts and sustained political will. It is time to close once and for all the chapter of conflict and destruction that has haunted the Great Lakes region for over a century and to raise the curtain on an era of peace and security. We hope that today's open debate will pave the way towards the beginning of such an end.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): I thank the delegation of Angola for organizing this open debate on one of the regions of Africa that has taken up a very large part of the Security Council's time over the past two decades. I also want to thank the briefers, especially Special Envoy Djinnit, Mr. Chergui, and Mr. Pillai of the World Bank, for their helpful briefings on the contributions of their institutions to the ongoing efforts in the Great Lakes region.

In the past two decades, the Great Lakes have witnessed some of the most brutal and devastating conflicts since the Second World War. The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 set in motion events that resulted in three major African wars and the deaths of a further 5 million people in the years that followed. For much of that period, the positions of the international community were characterized by missed opportunities and an inability or unwillingness to act. Africa's institutions have also struggled. Today we are still working through the consequences of those failures. And the costs in terms of lives lost, women and children traumatized, infrastructure shattered and development foregone continue to rise.

We must acknowledge that much work has been done by the African Union, regional organizations and players, the United Nations, the World Bank and intergovernmental and non-governmental actors. There have been bright spots. As the United States Ambassador pointed out, there have been impressive economic gains — in Rwanda in particular, but also in Uganda. As she also noted, however, political developments and human rights have not kept pace and undue weight has been given to the cult of personality, to the detriment of the long-term future of those countries.

Furthermore, we cannot honestly claim to be even close to achieving sustainable peace. In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, many of the same militias that played a central role in the previous conflicts continue to operate, largely with impunity, and the potential for violence around the upcoming elections poses serious risks to national and regional stability. In Burundi, we have watched as many of the gains of the past decade, in terms of development and national reconciliation, have crumbled away in a matter of months, while the President of the country and those around him have prioritized their personal ambitions over the good of Burundi, its people and the collective national commitment to reconciliation reflected in the Arusha Accords.

Regional engagement and a focus on confidence-building measures are essential for achieving long-term and sustainable solutions. We therefore welcome the United Nations Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework, which requires a consistent approach to implementation and active follow-up by the countries of the region. We also welcome the Great Lakes plan was just presented by the Secretary-General. The Security Council must actively support those processes.

During New Zealand's campaign for election to the Council, we heard time and time again that the single greatest priority for improving the Council's effectiveness was to strengthen its performance in the prevention of conflict. However, 10 years on from the adoption of the landmark resolution 1625 (2005), the Council continues to shy away from putting conflict prevention into practice, including in relation to the Great Lakes region.

My delegation recalls the sense of optimism that greeted the establishment in 2002 of the Council's Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa. Initially, that Working Group provided practical leadership on specific country situations and pioneered innovative working methods that have since been adopted by the Peacebuilding Commission's country-specific configurations. We would like to see such leadership again.

Since joining the Council, New Zealand has advocated for more serious and effective efforts to address emerging conflict risks. Effective conflict prevention requires a willingness to be flexible and to work patiently and discreetly with national and regional stakeholders. It also requires a genuine commitment by stakeholders to look for solutions, rather than for excuses for delaying engagement. New Zealand argued for early, discreet engagement on the part of the Council in Burundi, including through the dispatch of a mini-mission to support the efforts of the African Union (AU), thr Secretariat and regional partners. It took six months for that visit to happen. By that time, the crisis was entrenched, and the scope for quiet diplomacy was seriously diminished.

We cannot afford to allow opportunities for early preventive engagement to slip through our fingers. In our view, there are a number of steps that the Council can take to improve its game.

First, we must find ways to improve the Council's awareness of risks of evolving conflict, so as to enable more timely, consistent and effective attention to its role in managing them. To achieve that, we will need to be open to some changes in our working methods, so as to enable Council members to better engage using a problem-solving mindset. We also need to invest in building a real working relationship with the Department of Political Affairs and to strengthen the quality of information that we receive from the Department and the wider Secretariat.

Secondly, improving our game also means making practical improvements to the Council's willingness and ability to work with regional organizations, particularly the AU, on emerging conflict risks. The Council's interaction with the AU Peace and Security Council in Addis Ababa in January demonstrated the value of such engagement. We need to find ways to make meaningful engagement an everyday habit, particularly in dealing with complex challenges, such as the conflict risks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. Perhaps the Ad Hoc Working Group could play a greater role there.

Thirdly, both Council members and national and regional stakeholders need to move beyond the current false dichotomy between confrontation and non-intervention, which so often leads to inertia. Early engagement to prevent conflict is both a legitimate and a necessary role for the Council. At the same time, such efforts are more likely to be effective when conducted in a manner that is sensitive to concerns of national sovereignty and when stakeholders see the Council as a body committed to working with them in order to try to resolve real problems. That means proceeding early before problems are entrenched; it means being respectful and genuinely listening to national and regional actors; and it means coming to discussions without political agendas, other than the prevention of conflict and the saving of lives.

Fourthly, in order to be effective in preventing conflict, the Council must take a more inclusive approach, involving the countries concerned, important regional stakeholders and others who can contribute to our discussions in a balanced and collegial way. We think that we should make more use of informal, interactive formats aimed at deepening our political analysis of the issues involved and building shared understanding of the drivers of conflict. If we do not understand the issues properly, we will come up with the wrong solutions.

More broadly, New Zealand remains concerned that the international community and the United Nations itself continue to underfund conflict prevention. The review of peace operations identified the urgent need to shift our focus from investing resources when we respond to crises to the far more cost-effective and humane business of preventing conflict. We call for urgent and favourable consideration by the Fifth Committee of the modest proposals put forward in that regard by the Department of Political Affairs.

We need stronger mediation and analytical capacity in the United Nations, and we need to invest more in regional engagement.

It is vital that we pay close attention to the Great Lakes region in the year ahead, particularly the evolving situations in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and that the Council be ready to act — discreetly and sensitively, with the Secretariat and regional partners — to ensure that the people of that region are spared further tragedy so that they can build a future commensurate with the human and natural resource capital of the region.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Georges Rebelo Chikoti, Minister of External Relations of the Republic of Angola, for presiding over our meeting today. I commend the important initiatives launched by Angola during its Council presidency, foremost among them this open debate.

The Great Lakes region is at the heart of the African continent, and therefore at the centre of Egypt's concerns — not only because of geographical considerations but also for political, economic and development reasons, given the rich natural resources of the region, the great cultural heritage of its people and its massive growth potential. Promoting peace in the Great Lakes region will have an impact on and implications for development and stability across Africa.

As a sponsor member of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, Egypt is proud of the important role played by the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region in promoting democracy and strengthening cooperation among the countries of the region.

We should seek durable solutions based, first and foremost, on the principle of national ownership; secondly, on collective responsibility, given the regional dimension of peacebuilding operations and the challenges facing security and stability; and thirdly, on the building of partnerships with regional and international partners, especially the African Union and the United Nations system.

Despite the significant advances made and all of the efforts undertaken by the Congolese forces and the support and cooperation provided by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in that area, the situation in the eastern part of the country still suffers from instability and the spread of armed groups, which pose a major impediment to the establishment of State authority and a great threat to civilians, which has dire humanitarian consequences. In addition, a number of the countries in the region face serious challenges that require the support of the international community. The great challenges facing the elected authorities in Central Africa in terms of rebuilding State institutions, achieving reconciliation and finding durable solutions for dealing with armed groups require the consolidation of regional and international efforts.

With regard to the situation in Burundi, there is a need to build on the positive outcomes of important visits undertaken by the delegation of African Presidents, the Secretary-General and the Peacebuilding Commission and to intensify efforts aimed at achieving a political solution through inclusive national dialogue. All possible assistance must be extended to the mediation efforts of the African Union and the East African Community. Actions to prevent conflicts must be undertaken under the coordination of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General.

Armed groups pose the greatest security impediment in the region. Egypt therefore welcomes the communiqué issued by the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, which includes measures aimed at resuming joint military operations against armed groups. Egypt also stresses the need for all the parties to implement their obligations set out in the Nairobi Declarations and the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Egypt would like to stress the need to coordinate United Nations efforts with the African Union and international partners, with a view to creating a regional environment that promotes those commitments and requirements.

Moreover, the neutralization of armed groups requires the pursuit of an integrated approach that is not limited to military means alone, but also includes measures to address the root causes of instability. The most important reason for those conflicts is likely the illegal exploitation and trafficking in natural resources, which is worth more than $1.2 billion annually. Such trafficking finances the activities of armed groups and organized crime and deprives the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo of their natural resources and the potential contribution that those resouces could make to the national development process.

I would like to refer to important developments over the past few years, including the development of national legislation with regard to the management of natural resources and fighting the illicit exploitation thereof. We must address the gap between the enactment of laws and the implementation of those laws on the ground. Better enforcement would allow the region and beyond to uphold the rule of law and to hold perpetrators to account. Egypt will continue to accord that matter due importance through its chairmanship of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) and the work of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which traces the financing of armed groups there.

An integrated approach to addressing those different challenges requires an emphasis on the close relationship among peace, security and development. In that regard, Egypt welcomes the holding of the Private Sector Investment Conference for the Great Lakes Region, given the potential contribution of the private sector to development and the creation of jobs for youth.

In view of its close relations with the countries of the region, Egypt is keen to do its part in supporting development projects, especially through the platform of the Egypt Agency for Development Partnerships, through capacity-building and the exchange of expertise in all development spheres. Furthermore, Egypt's initiative for the development of the Nile River Basin countries has been extended to include several projects in the Great Lakes region in areas such as infrastructure and energy. Recently, a memorandum of understanding was signed with the Congolese development agency for the development of such projects in the region.

In conclusion, it is our hope that our debate today will provide an opportunity to reinvigorate the resolve of the international community to bolster the will of the countries in the Great Lakes region and its people to work towards peace, stability and development across the region.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): The Great Lakes region has been the subject of a great deal of attention on the part of the Security Council for many years. The commitment of the United Nations demonstrates the importance attached to stability in that region at the heart of Africa. With over a third of United Nations peacekeepers deployed around the world, today the Great Lakes region still remains a cause for concern and the subject of great attention for the international community.

That is why we thank you, Sir, both as President of the Security Council and as the head of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, for having organized this important meeting. Our efforts must continue. We also welcome the presence of the Secretary-General, several ministers from the countries of the region and the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, Mr. Chergui, as well as the representative of the World Bank, Mr. Pillai. We thank them as well as Mr. Said Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, for his commitment and we support the road map that he has put forward for implementation.

In his report (S/2016/232) on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Secretary-General outlines certain positive developments in the region, in particular the holding of largely peaceful elections in Tanzania, but also in the Central African Republic, where the challenges were immense. Today a new era is opening in that country. The end of the transition and the establishment of elected authorities requires our continued commitment to help the country in stabilizing and developing.

On the other hand, the political crisis in Burundi, which is also accompanied by a serious security and humanitarian crisis, is a sad reminder that we must never be complacent. After a decade of commitment on the part of the United Nations, which has enabled Burundi to begin its journey on the road towards stability as outlined in the Arusha Accords, we are concerned by the developments in the country. It is crucial that all regional and international actors join efforts to ensure that violence ends and that a genuine dialogue begins without any delay. France, together with the United Nations and the African Union, will continue to act to end that crisis and to re-establish peace and stability while respecting human rights.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we are on the eve of a crucial period for the future of a country where the United Nations has been so committed. The situation has improved since 1999, when the Council decided to create the United Nations Observer Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Nevertheless, we remain concerned by the continuing fragility of the country. In several regions, the security situation has stabilized and the restoration of the State's authority is taking place across much of its vast territory. The capacity of the Congolese armed forces and the Congolese national police have also been reinforced. However, instability in the east of the country remains a reality, with dozens of armed groups still contributing to the expansion of a spiral of violence. They are illegally exploiting natural resources and are committing abuses against the population, who has already suffered too much. Everyone must play their part to put a definitive end to the threat posed by those groups. Most concerned in that regard, of course, are the authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in cooperation with the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the countries of the region.

Efforts to restrict political space also concern us, on the eve of important electoral deadlines for the country's future. The deadlines stipulated for those elections, envisaged in the Constitution as taking place by the end of the year, concern us, especially as they risk causing a new period of instability in the country. Respect for civil liberties is essential, and that calls for vigilance on our part. We urge the authorities of the Democratic Republic of Congo to respect their constitutional commitments as well as their international commitments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, and we encourage all stakeholders to move towards dialogue in all its forms, and not to resort to violence. In that regard, again, the Security Council will have to be particularly vigilant, at a time when we are considering the renewal of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

France is a long-time friend of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the countries of the region. Our greatest wish, as a close partner and member of the Security Council, is to see those countries consolidate their momentum towards sustainable peace and stability. That would allow them finally to profit from the wealth of their natural resources and to focus on their development and the well-being of their populations. In that vein, we welcome the holding in Kinshasa on 24 and 25 February of the Private Sector Investment Conference for the Great Lakes Region, which brought with it hopes for the essential economic development of the region. Better regional economic cooperation will be crucial to creating common and shared interests and for overcoming divisions. The regional strategic plan presented today and the commitment of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region will be key to keep moving in that direction. France, along with the European Union and the United Nations, remains at your side, Sir, in your capacity within the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, to help the whole of the region along that path.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela appreciates the Republic of Angola's initiative in convening this timely and important debate on the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region. We welcome the Minister for External Affairs of Angola, Mr. Georges Rebelo Pinto Chikoti. We also appreciate the briefings by the Secretary-General, the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region and the Adviser to the Office of the Vice President for the Africa region of the World Bank.

Venezuela associates itself with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela would like to highlight the valuable role played by Angola in its capacity as Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region since 2014, and believes that concerted action on the part of the the Conference, the United Nations, the African Union and the Southern African Development Community is a priority if we are to accelerate development and consolidate regional peace.

Today, the countries of the region are facing serious threats to their stability and economic development, thanks to a a number of distinct conflicts in which exclusion, the exploitation of natural resources and poverty play a important role, which in turn affects the States' consolidation of their institutions and jeopardizes the progress that has been achieved in recent years. Various criminal groups have taken advantage of the vacuum created by that institutional weakness to exploit and trade illegally in the region's mineral resources and wildlife, as the Secretary-General highlights in his report on the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region (S/2016/232), which indicates that 50 per cent of that illegal traffic comes from the illicit trade in gold. If such extraction were done legally under the direction of the States in the region, the revenues would substantially benefit their economic and social development.

In that context, it is worth noting that since 1990 at least 18 armed conflicts have been funded directly through the illegal extraction and trade of natural resources. That is why the natural resources best suited to financing conflicts are those that can most easily be extracted, concealed and sold. In many cases, armed groups do not have to carry out the extraction directly but simply finance themselves through illegal taxes on the commodities' trade and export transit routes. In that regard, the international community should support and strengthen the institutional capacity of the countries affected by this issue to enable them to have full and sovereign control over their natural resources, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1803 (XVII), adopted in 1962.

The complexity of the problems affecting the countries of the Great Lakes region requires us to implement an international policy of genuine cooperation and solidarity that takes into account the countries' individual situations in creating the economic and social conditions conducive to eradicating poverty, exclusion and violence. We would like to highlight the efforts of the States and regional bodies of Central Africa to work for peace and democracy. In that regard, we welcome the elections that have been held in the region in recent months. We encourage the international community to support and respect the sovereign decision of the region's citizens in electing their authorities while avoiding the customary practice of interfering in those countries' internal affairs. We also urge for stability and national reconciliation in order to overcome the political and security difficulties that may arise, so as to resolve differences through political negotiation at both the national and regional level.

Venezuela is aware that dealing with such conflict situations is a challenge both for the Governments of the countries in the region and for regional and subregional bodies and the United Nations. Extreme actions and violence represent a major challenge to peace. We therefore firmly condemn any violation of human rights or international humanitarian law caused by armed clashes and emphasize the importance of accountability for ending persistent cycles of impunity. We also support the fight against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. With the proliferation of weapons being a destabilizing factor in the region, we believe that the international community, and the Security Council in particular, should redouble its efforts to ban the transfer of arms to non-State actors.

It is important to give direct support to countries that have ended fighting in order to ensure they do not relapse into conflict, by providing them with the capacity to manage their natural resources and their economies themselves, including by strengthening their institutions. Cooperation on the part of international donors, international financial institutions and bilateral partners, without conditions, is crucial to promoting development projects, reducing the vulnerability of the population and revitalizing economic activity in the Great Lakes region. We believe that the United Nations system in the Great Lakes region should continue to promote economic development, which should be handled holistically. It is vital to ensure that the settlement of conflicts addresses the underlying economic and social causes of the problems that have historically plagued these States. The political process must be addressed in a multidimensional way, supported by the pillars of development policy, the protection of human rights and the eradication of poverty, which will ultimately bring shared benefits.

Lastly, we reiterate our solidarity with and support to the work that the countries of Africa are doing to promote peace and economic and social development for their peoples. We believe that the priorities established in the road map for the Regional Strategic Framework for the countries of the Great Lakes region should be our shared goal, supported by the entire international community.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Senegal is pleased to see the Minister for External Affairs of Angola presiding over today's meeting of the Security Council. We also welcome the briefings of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, and those of Mr. Said Djinnit, Mr. Smail Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union and Mr. Vijay Pillai, Adviser to the Office of the Vice President for the Africa region of the World Bank.

The delegation of Senegal greatly appreciates the opportunity provided today by the Angolan presidency to discuss the burning issue of the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region. The subject is important in that it directly concerns a dozen countries in the heart of Africa in a sensitive region that for decades has unfortunately been afflicted by multidimensional crises with diverse causes resulting from the convergence of historical, demographic, economic, social and political factors. It is also important for the numerous initiatives that are currently under way with the aim of halting this crisis-provoking dynamic and turning it into a virtuous cycle of stability, prosperity and inclusive, sustainable development.

A review of the situation in the Great Lakes region points inevitably to how closely the issues are tied to the land, to natural resources, to the division of power, the rule of law and good governance, all factors that create fertile ground for intercommunal clashes. We recall the genocide that occurred in Rwanda in 1994 and the intra-communitarian wars in Burundi, which were tragedies that culminated in a spiral of instability in that important region of the continent.

In addition to the evolving aftermath of those tragedies, other regional conflicts have exacted a heavy toll on the trust and relations among States, creating challenges and substantial limits to necessary regional cooperation. Indeed, various reports on the subject, including those of the Secretary-General, reveal an emerging pattern in the the causes and manifestations of the crises wracking the region. Without being exhaustive, we can identify the following, inter alia: the growing number of armed non-State entities; inter-community or ethnic tensions; problems pertaining to governance and democracy; the illegal exploitation of natural resources that fuel conflicts; the cyclical flows of refugees and internally displaced persons, and their resulting humanitarian consequences; the high number of civilian victims in that context of insecurity; sexual and gender-based abuse, particularly against women and girls; and lest we forget, the poignant case of children who are often recruited by warring parties.

Given those crucial challenges, the momentum launched by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region is of critical relevance, in that it allows us to establish a holistic regional approach that, above and beyond providing localized and necessarily piecemeal responses to conflicts and crises, takes into account of the need for prevention, integration, and the promotion of peace and sustainable development in the region. Similarly, the Senegalese delegation believes that the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region, which was signed in 2006 by members of that organization, represents a reference point for stimulating and coordinating regional efforts in the following areas: peace and security; democracy and good governance; economic development and regional integration; and humanitarian and social issues.

A similar approach seems to justify the conclusion of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, which, as its name suggests, is specifically designed to handle the challenges raised by the chronic insecurity in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I take this opportunity to call on the signatory countries to strengthen their commitment and cooperation in promoting the effective implementation of that important regional instrument.

Analyzing several crisis situations in Africa teaches us that, when duly assumed, regional leadership can be a decisive factor in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. It is therefore important to work to better harmonize the policies initiated by the various subregional, regional and international organizations with regard to the Great Lakes region with a view to effective and coordinated action on the ground at every stage, from early warning to the lasting resolution of conflicts, including peacebuilding, which is in and of itself a considerable tool for preventing the resurgence of crises. Moreover, taking into account the importance of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, the delegation of Senegal stresses the importance of strengthening of a partnership with greater synergies between the Security Council and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, which your country, Sir, is leading so effectively. We are convinced that sharing efforts and resources will build the capacities and effectiveness of regional entities in preventing and resolving conflicts.

The security challenges facing the region require the reinforced commitment of the international community and optimal regional cooperation in order, among other things, to end the threat of armed groups in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and effectively combat the illegal exploitation of raw materials. We also need a strong commitment of the States of the region and regional and subregional organizations, supported by the relevant international bodies, to assuming responsibility for electoral processes in an effective and sustainable manner, which very often take place against a background marked by tension that can lead to devastaing conflict.

We also take this opportunity to commend the outstanding contribution of women in the region to peace and reconciliation, in particular through the Great Lakes Women's Platform, which allows women to make their voices heard and to participate more actively in the decisions and social and economic development of the region. The programme is a concrete embodiment of the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, and has already chalked up significant achievements that draw in further support at regional and international levels.

In conclusion, I should like to stress the importance of the development aspect of the search for solutions to the challenges facing the Great Lakes region, and call for the full inclusion not only of women, but also of young people, who need to be included in the private sector of the Great Lakes region.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): I would like to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation for Angola's leadership, as Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, in consolidating peace and security in the region. I also thank the Secretary-General and the guest speakers for their briefings.

Today, I wish to focus on one crucial issue — the importance of preventing lapses and relapses into conflict. According to the *World Development Report 2011*, 57 per cent of all countries that experienced civil war between 1945 and 2009 returned to conflict. Unfortunately, that is the case in the Great Lakes region. The people of the region have been suffering from instability for too long. In that regard, let me share with the Council the outcomes of the Peacebuilding Commission's Working Group on Lessons Learned.

As Chair of the Group until last year, I led discussions on the challenges faced by post-conflict countries during and after United Nations mission drawdown. From that exercise, we drew two lessons. The first is that there is a need for the sustained attention of the international community to mitigating political and financial gaps resulting from United Nations mission drawdowns. The second is that there is a need for countries in transition to build national institutional capacities to achieve lasting peace. The question is how to translate these lessons learned into practice in post-conflict settings to prevent relapses.

The United Nations has various tools for funding. In addition to the funds and programmes of the United Nations, we have the Peacebuilding Fund and the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security at our disposal. Let us make good use of them. These funds carry out great work. Let me cite some examples. In Burundi, the Peacebuilding Fund recently supported a group of 512 female community mediators in addressing more than 5,000 local disputes. These female mediators are helping to reduce tension within communities and also between communities and security forces. The United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security supported the empowerment of conflict-affected communities in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. That project supported the restoration of livelihoods and agriculture, benefitting returnees, internally displaced persons and members of host communities. It also provided access to improved social services and local infrastructure. Both funds contribute to empowering people in fragile situations and to enhancing social resilience against relapse into conflict.

Countries in transition can also make use of United Nations and bilateral donor partnerships to consolidate peace. Let me elaborate on the actions Japan has taken in partnership with the United Nations focusing on the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The first example is an institution-building programme. For 12 years Japan has provided training for more than 20,000 of the country's total of 100,000 police officers, in collaboration with police forces of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This means that one of every five police officers in that country has been trained by Japan. We have also undertaken the training of trainers to strengthen the Democratic Republic of the Congo's training capacities. Given that most of that country's officers, unfortunately, start working without any training, we believe the programme has greatly contributed to enhancing the capacity of the police force of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The second example is a project for the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups into an education system in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Children are mixed discreetly with other children in schools in order to avoid prejudice. This project provides support not only to the children, but also to the entire community so that children can go to school. For example, parents are given support to sustain their own livelihood. It is important that children are not relied upon as a source of labour. Also, a professional training centre for youth employment has been built.

This is an ongoing project carried out in collaboration with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UN-Women, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund. We look forward to its successful outcome.

Japan wishes to hold an open debate on the theme of peacebuilding in Africa during our Council presidency in the month of July. We would like to fully utilize today's very timely discussion in preparation for our open debate in July.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Sir, we welcome you as President of the Security Council, and we hope that your personal participation in today's meeting and Angola's active role in the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, will contribute to intensification of this organ's activities in the search for answers to the region's challenges.

The activities of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region are complemented by the active efforts of the international community to settle conflicts and to normalize the situation in the region. This constructive involvement is demonstrated by, among other things, the Secretary-General's recent visit to the subregion and by the successful Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference. We hope that it will give impetus to economic cooperation among the countries in the region and will facilitate the strengthening of peace and trust there. I take this opportunity to note the role of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to the Great Lakes Region, Said Djinnit, in organizing that Conference.

A cornerstone of stability in the Great Lakes region is the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Russia advocates all signatories fulfilling all of their obligations, including respect for sovereignty, non-intervention in the internal affairs of one another's countries, and the consolidation of trust among the countries of the subregion. In that context, we cannot help but be concerned by the mutual accusations we have heard recently, including about the recruitment of militants from among refugees. We call on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to take steps for de-escalation, including the utilization of the broadened joint monitoring mechanism, which is stipulated by the Framework.

We are compelled to note that, three years after the signing of the Framework, its military component is still far from fully realized. We pay tribute to the efforts of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which remains committed to the fight against militias and to stabilizing the situation. However, armed groups remain active in the country and in the region as a whole, contributing to the prolongation of inter-ethnic conflict, the illegal proliferation of weapons and the worsening humanitarian situation. It is clear that there is no solution through the simple use of force. Comprehensive measures are needed to eradicate the root causes of the conflict, including via consolidating State power in the areas freed from rebels. At the same time, we call on country's Government and on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to quickly renew their full-scale joint operations to neutralize militias, and we welcome the January signing of an agreement on the resumption of cooperation in that area.

We are also concerned by the state of affairs regarding repatriations from Uganda and Rwanda to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular of several hundred former combatants of the Mouvement du 23 mars. Despite active efforts through the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, this process has practically ground to a halt. The lack of practical results might lead to recidivism among the former militants from the Movement. The implementation of the Framework might be made easier by the consolidation of its governing structures. We welcome the measures being taken by the signatory countries to increase the effectiveness of the functioning of the regional monitoring mechanism, as well as the efforts by the Technical Support Committee.

Many countries in the region are actively establishing or reforming democratic institutions. Some of them are entering an important pre-election period. We welcome the mediation and good offices through the United Nations and regional organizations in helping to start national mechanisms for political dialogue in those countries. Having said that, there can be no doubt that any internal political conclusions will lead to long-term stability only if they are reached and adopted by the countries themselves. Imposing solutions in such affairs is unacceptable.

As a member of the Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region, Russia intends to assist further in the search for a peaceful process in the region.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to congratulate the Angolan presidency for organizing this debate, as well as for the concept note that has been distributed (S/2016/223, annex). Allow me as well to say how pleased we are at the participation of many other ministers and deputy ministers present today, as well as of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, and the Adviser from the Office of the Vice President of the World Bank. Uruguay also welcomes the participation of the Secretary-General at the beginning of our meeting and is pleased to note its satisfaction with and support for the work he is doing in the different areas of his activity.

At this stage in the debate, many of my remarks have already been said by speakers that preceded me, so I will deliver a shortened version.

My country joins others that have expressed their satisfaction at positive developments in various elements the Great Lakes region, in particular those due to the intense effort carried out by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and the excellent level of work and partnership with the United Nations in this entire matter. We also emphasize, as other delegations have, the fundamental importance that we attach to development and the protection of human rights and peace and security in the area, and we stress the need to address the structural causes underpinning all the conflicts in the area. Our country has a long-standing commitment to the Great Lakes region, which is especially reflected in our commitment to the stability and pacification of the Democratic Republic of the Congo through our contribution of troops to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

We agree with what was said a few minutes ago in this Chamber with respect to the importance of the peacekeeping operations in the Great Lakes region and their continuity. We also agree, in particular, in the light of the threats to the ongoing peacekeeping operations as a result of unilateral actions that have been developed in certain contexts during the last few days. With regard to MONUSCO, Uruguay wishes to express its satisfaction with the recent agreement signed between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO, in order to resume cooperation between the Mission and the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, convinced that strengthening cooperation between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations is essential to fulfilling the mandate of the Mission, hopes that the agreement will be fully implemented.

Similarly, Uruguay is closely monitoring the evolution of the political process and is looking forward to democratic elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo taking place in a transparent and inclusive manner. In that context, Uruguay would like to express its support for the work that is being done by African Union facilitator, former Prime Minister of Togo, Mr. Edem Kodjo, with a view to supporting a transparent and inclusive dialogue between all political actors. It is crucial that the authorities ensure respect for human rights and avoid outbreaks of violence before, during and after the elections.

Uruguay is concerned about the current political situation in Burundi and the growing human rights violations committed within its territory and expects the parties to reach a peaceful and negotiated resolution to the conflict. It also believes that the thousands of refugees from Burundi who have been displaced to neighbouring countries should be a matter of concern and priority for the international community. In this context, Uruguay wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his efforts during his recent visit to Burundi, which followed the visit made by the members of the Security Council, hoping that President Pierre Nkurunziza will honour his commitments and allow the development of a transparent and inclusive process of dialogue for the parties involved.

For Uruguay, of particular concern are the possible repercussions that the situation in Burundi may have at the regional level and for the tension that has arisen between the Government of Burundi and Rwanda. In this regard, we urge the Governments of both countries to resolve their differences through dialogue because the revitalization of their good-neighbourly relations and spirit of cooperation will help to ensure that peace and stability take substantial root.

We cannot end our statement without calling the Governments of the region and the international community as a whole to unite their efforts aimed at achieving political and social stability in the Great Lakes region. These efforts must be based on strict respect for the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries and in a renewed agreement not to tolerate or lend assistance or support of any kind to armed groups operating in the region, nor to shelter or protect any person accused of serious crimes, and to cooperate with the International Criminal Court in arresting people accused of these crimes where appropriate so that impunity does not prevail, so as to put an end to the very serious humanitarian situation and ensure the protection of civilians and the strict respect for human rights of all people without distinction.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China commends Angola for its initiative in convening today's open debate. We are pleased to see Angolan Minister for Foreign Affairs Chikoti here in New York, presiding over today's meeting. I thnk the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Said Djinnit, the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, Mr. Smail Chergui, and the representative of the World Bank, Mr. Vijay Pillai, for their briefings.

The Great Lakes region, which is in the heart of the African continent, is steeped with a long history and rich cultural heritage and blessed with tremendous potential for development. However, for a long time, the Great Lakes region has been troubled by frequent armed action and instability in the security environment, giving rise to underdevelopment and a grim humanitarian situation. China welcomes the Secretary-General's visit to Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo towards the end of February during which he attended the first private sector investment in the Great Lakes region, which speaks volumes about the level of attention and support the United Nations accords to peace and development in the region.

The States of the Great Lakes region are an interdependent community of common destiny and shared interests. The interests of all countries in the region are best served by ensuring common security, realizing shared development and promoting win-win cooperation. China supports the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in actively facilitating the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region, working hard to resolve regional conflicts through good offices and promoting general security and common development in the region on all fronts. China applauds the active efforts of the countries of the Great Lakes region and would like to see all parties in the region build confidence and consensus in line with their shared interests as countries in the region, commit to eliminating the root causes of disputes and conflicts and realize lasting peace and common development in the region. In this vein, I would like to highlight the following four points.

First, the Framework should be unswervingly implemented to achieve the shared goals. China encourages countries in the region to respect each other's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, actively promote political trust among the parties and reinforce good-neighbourliness. We hope the international community will, in support of the wishes of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, actively help it to intensify security sector reform, strengthen governance in the eastern part of the country and promote national reconciliation, while lending robust support to the Regional Oversight Mechanism and Technical Support Committee of the Framework. China welcomes the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Djinnit's proposal on the nine priorities for the period 2015-2017 and supports the continued positive, constructive role he has been playing in assisting the States of the Great Lakes region to implement the Framework.

Secondly, regional security capacity-building and cooperation should be strengthened to achieve common security. China welcomes the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's positive endeavour to build up its national armed forces (FARDC) and neutralize armed groups, and appeals to the international community to step up the training of and support for the FARDC so that it can take on the role of defending national security as soon as possible. We hope that the States of the region will actively implement the Nairobi Declaration and work together on the repatriation of former Mouvement du 23 mars fighters and on jointly neutralizing such armed groups as the Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda and the Allied Democratic Forces.

We hope that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) will assist and support the FARDC in addressing the threats posed by armed groups within the purview of its Security Council mandate. China welcomes the decision of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MONUSCO to resume joint military operations against armed groups. We hope that strategic dialogue between the two parties will continue, and that such issues as the MONUSCO drawdown and exit will be properly resolved in the light of the wishes and practical needs of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Thirdly, investment in the region's development should be scaled up to achieve common development. Poverty and underdevelopment are among the root causes of the chronic conflicts in the Great Lakes region. China welcomes the drafting by the United Nations country teams in the Great Lakes region of the Regional Strategic Framework to support the region's economic integration, boost cross-border trade and promote the sustainable management of natural resources. We appeal to the international community to make greater investments in the agriculture, energy, infrastructure, communications and tourism sectors of the countries of the region in order to create more jobs and facilitate regional trade and connectivity, so that those countries can all partake of the peace dividend and achieve economic prosperity. We hope that the World Bank will actively implement the Great Lakes region initiative, honour its $1.4 billion pledge to the region and make it available as soon as possible, so as to offer strong support to the region's economic development and employment improvements.

Fourthly, the functions of regional and subregional organizations should be leveraged to build synergy and draw on each other's strengths. The African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the East African Community, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and other regional and subregional organizations have their roots in Africa and are therefore knowledgeable about and in tune with Africa. They enjoy prominent advantages and have played an important role and accumulted a wealth of experience in addressing such issues as those concerning Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan.

China supports the ongoing joint efforts of the regional and subregional organizations concerned to work to resolve hot issues in the region through dialogue, mediation and good offices. The United Nations and the international community at large should strengthen coordination with the regional and subregional organizations concerned and work together for a peaceful and stable Great Lakes region.

China attaches great importance to developing our relations with Africa. At the Johannesburg summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, held in December 2015, His Excellency Mr. Xi Jinping, President of China, proposed five pillars for China-Africa relations: political equality and trust, win-win economic cooperation, mutually enriching cultural exchanges, mutual assistance in security, and solidarity and coordination in international affairs. China is ready to enage in practical, results-oriented cooperation with Africa in the following 10 areas: industrialization, the modernization of agriculture, infrastructure, finance, green development, trade and investment facilitation, poverty reduction, public health, culture, and peace and security. China is ready to work with the entire African continent to implement the outcomes of the Johannesburg summit, improve livelihoods in Africa and continuously support African States in building their independent development capacities in the light of Africa's actual needs.

China has been consistently supportive of the peace process in the Great Lakes region and sent a special Government representative on African affairs to the countries of the region on multiple good offices missions. China is an active player in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, supports Africa in addressing its own problems in the African way, contributes to the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the East African Community, and helps the regional organizations concerned to promote regional peace. We stand ready to work with the countries of the region and the international community in unremitting efforts for the peace, stability, prosperity and development of the Great Lakes region.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): It is a great pleasure to see you, Mr. Minister, presiding over our meeting.

At the outset, I should like to state that Ukraine also aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

The security situation in the Great Lakes region remains a topical issue on the Security Council's agenda after several decades of consideration and numerous decisions taken on this subject. The root causes of conflicts in the region are all too familiar: inter-ethnic and intertribal rivalries, inefficient governance, weak political institutions, judicial systems partial to the views of those who happen to be in power, high levels of corruption, widespread poverty, the pervasive and deeply destabilizing activities of uncontrolled armed groups, flows of refugees and displaced persons due to armed conflicts and internal instability, and porous and fluid borders.

In this context, the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains one of the biggest concerns. As Franz Fanon, an influential thinker and Afro-Caribbean philosopher, once said: "Africa is shaped like a gun, and Congo is the trigger. If that explosive trigger bursts, it's the whole Africa that will explode". That is why I would briefly touch upon the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the first place.

As the Council is aware, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has not had a peaceful transfer of power in the 55 years since its independence. Even today, we all have the same worries that the ongoing internal dispute over the elections in that country could spark violence, with a possible spillover of instability into neighboring countries. The Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo limits a President's tenure to two popularly elected terms. This provision was established after years of the unchecked Mobutu rule, and it constitutes a safeguard against a return to dictatorial practices.

It is an axiom that a democratic change of power through elections is a fundamental principle and a gateway towards progress in other areas of the social and economic development of a country or community, as opposed to a continued simmering of popular discord, which can eventually erupt in a violent protest, casting the country back to reliving earlier distressful experiences. Bearing this in mind, we call upon all national stakeholders, for the sake of their own people, to pursue political dialogue and to accept the international mediation of the United Nations, African Union or other authoritative regional organization on this issue.

One cannot but mention another issue that affects the whole region — the irregular armed groups present in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They are still active in the eastern part of the country and continue to terrorize the civilian population, despite our numerous calls for their neutralization and the deployment in the area of one of the largest United Nations peacekeeping missions, which we fully support. In this regard, as Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic, I would like to draw Council members' attention to the fact that the Committee recently added to its sanctions list the odious Lord's Resistance Army and its leader in response to its destructive violent activities affecting a large area of the region.

We believe that the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region remains one of the key multilateral mechanisms that can bring stability to the country. Proceeding from the main principles and provisions of that document, it is of utmost importance for all parties and other relevant stakeholders to continue undertaking the necessary efforts aimed at fulfilling their obligations and commitments arising from the Framework. Taking into account the joint commitment not to interfere in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries, we are deeply concerned over reports, including those coming from the Panel of Experts, about numerous cases of the territory and capacities of neighbouring countries being used to train armed groups and infiltrate them into adjacent regions and conflict areas.

The continued smuggling of natural resources from the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains among other serious challenges to the peace and stability of the region. Regrettably, in the regional context, natural resources tend to fuel conflicts rather that contribute to sustainable development and economic prosperity. In view of recorded facts with regard to the involvement of military elements in the smuggling, and the inability of the relevant authorities to prevent the illegal use of natural resources, we believe that additional serious efforts are needed to address the phenomenon and reverse the prevailing trend. In our view, the International Conference of the Great Lakes Regional Initiative against the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources is a good example of the search for a common solution that could ensure that those resources are used to generate much-needed revenue and to promote regional development.

The flow of refugees is another pressing challenge faced by the Great Lakes region. Internal instability, poor governance, ethnic intolerance and violations of human rights on a massive scale by illegal armed groups cause people to flee. As a result, approximately 430,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo are seeking shelter in Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. In that connection, I cannot overlook the situation in Burundi. We cannot afford to waste the chance to prevent the impending conflict situation from descending into chaos. The wounds are still fresh, as we all remember very well the terrible repercussions of the Burundian genocide in 1972 and the 1993-2005 civil war there. It is the duty of the Security Council and of the whole international community to ensure that such tragic events do not unfold again. All stakeholders must spare no effort to prevent any development that could increase the risk of a full-fledged conflict and mounting violence against the Burundian population. For its part, the Burundian Government should not fail to live up to its commitments and obligations.

I am proud of Ukraine's contribution to United Nations efforts to bring stability to the Great Lakes region, especially as one of the major troop-contributing countries to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and as a former member and vice-Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission. We are resolved to maintain that commitment, including as a member of the Security Council in the period 2016-2017.

Peace, stability and prosperity in the Great Lakes region require strong commitment, joint action and dialogue. All of those are the necessary prerequisites for addressing current conflicts and preventing future crises and calamities. Let us hope that this discussion will serve as a Council contribution to fostering that commitment and as a sign of an unwavering dedication to carrying out our responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in that crucially important region.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I would also like to appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a reasonable speed so that interpretation may be provided accurately. I wish to inform all concerned that we will be carrying out this open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a very large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation of Burundi.

Mr. Nyamitwe (Burundi): At the outset, please allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your country, Angola, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March 2016. I wish to express my appreciation for the timely scheduling of this meeting on this theme. This region has suffered at least three major wars over the past 25 years, leaving 3 to 5 million people dead and a huge number of refugees as a result. We have to learn from the past. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General, the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region and the representative of the World Bank for their briefings.

We associate ourselves with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

My delegation appreciates the role of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region in organizing the Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference last February. We believe that creating economic opportunities for youths is key to preventing conflicts. I also wish to acknowledge the positive role of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in the fight against the illegal exploitation of natural resources and in addressing regional peace and security issues.

Burundi is recovering from a massive, severe campaign of violent regime change. All possible means imaginable were used. All types of people were called upon. The sound of that campaign reverberated in places as far as this very building. Information was manipulated, while all sorts of prophecies competed in predicting the worst that could happen to Burundi. The opposition was clearly given credence for all its allegations. And at least one speaker today relayed those at this meeting.

Our history does not start with the re-election of President Pierre Nkurunziza. As a matter of fact, when one assesses the situation that our country is fixing, one cannot help but conclude that violence predates the current term of the President. Burundi was attacked on 30 December 2014 by a group affiliated to an opposition political party, with a view to thwarting the 2015 electoral process and installing a different political regime in Burundi. The insurrection of April 2015 was organized by the same ring of politicians, associated with groups in the military and police, again, with the objective of overthrowing the Government. The attempted coup of 13 May 2015 and the subsequent attacks on Burundi from neighbouring Rwanda confirmed the overall objective of regime change.

It goes without saying that information was manipulated and some organizations formulated policies with regard to my country based upon wrong assessments, or in the absence of any assessment at all. Groups that, in the name of exercising the right of assembly, have been busy killing innocent civilians over the past months are now coming out in the open. Many are confessing their crimes, indicating who their leaders are and which country trained them. One is met with horror and shock as mass graves are found one by one in the hotbeds of the insurrection. Yet not long ago, especially in the wake of the simultaneous attack against three strategic military barracks, Government forces were accused, without any regard to either its right of self-defence or the aggressive nature of the assailants. Again, right here a short while ago, the United Kingdom Minister decided to attack Burundi on this issue without regard for those developments.

Burundi is not on the verge of a precipice. Contrary to the rhetoric that we have heard here, we believe that the security situation is improving. The challenges of today are met with the resolve of President Nkurunziza and the Government to address them. On human rights, for instance, our Government has made a number of goodwill gestures, in full compliance with our own laws and in respect of our sovereignty. A presidential decree granting pardon to 2,000 prisoners was issued, and their release is ongoing. That number includes youths who had been arrested because of acts of violence against the State and civilians over the recent months.

While we understand the legitimate concerns that have been raised from time to time, we wish to take this opportunity to invite our friends, near and far, to understand our peculiar situation. As a sovereign State, Burundi also has laws, which need to be enforced, as befitting independent States. There is a country called Burundi.

In view of all this, we find it difficult to understand some of the decisions made against our country by some partners, who have consistently proclaimed, urbi et orbi, that they want peace and stability in Burundi. Cutting aid to the Government does not fall in the category of measures aimed at stabilizing the country — to the contrary.

Our Government has offered cooperation in monitoring the human rights situation on the ground. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights dispatched a team of three experts, who concluded their mission last week. We are finalizing the memorandum of understanding with the African Union on monitoring the human rights situation. The number of monitors has increased to 200 — 100 are in charge of human rights and the other 100 are military experts — and part of their mandate is to monitor the border with Rwanda.

Criminal acts involving the mass graves, which for months were not clear, are no longer mysteries. We now know who killed the three Italian nuns two years ago and who killed and hurriedly buried innocent civilians in areas that were hitherto covered by remote-controlled demonstrations. Criminals are now talking; they are now indicating who gave them what and which country in particular played which role.

With regard to the right of association, I wish to call for caution, as some groups claim to speak in the name of the human rights cause but are actually engaged in efforts to promote one side of the conflict. Sometimes they promote ethnic hatred, with all the consequences that entails.

As for the freedom of the press, two radio stations that had been shut down in the wake of the attempted coup have been authorized to operate once again. Today, 13 radio stations operate on the territory. Only three are still shut down, for obvious reasons of ongoing investigations.

With regard to dialogue, former President Mkapa of Tanzania is already at work. Last Friday he concluded his tour in the region by visiting Burundi, where he was received by President Nkurunziza. We will soon be informed of what is to be the way forward. It is our view that the stability, security and territorial integrity of the State should not be sacrificed at the altar of inclusiveness. Resolution 2248 (2015) charts the way forward. President Mkapa needs to be encouraged and supported. Our Government trusts in his capacity to conduct the dialogue process towards new horizons. Meanwhile, the National Commission for Dialogue has opened a debate on important matters pertaining to the life of our nation. There can be no more inclusiveness than that which brings on board all the citizens of the country. Our Government asks for support.

The United Nations Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework was developed because the region was plagued with negative forces and counted millions of refugees. Both challenges compound the already existing fragility of the region. The Framework was established to address both issues by devising ways of creating wealth for future generations while fostering cooperation among concerned countries.

Obviously, acts of aggression are contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and to the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Supporting negative elements that disturb peace in neighbouring countries is prohibited by existing relevant instruments. Recruiting refugees for the sole purpose of destabilizing Burundi is a clear violation of international law. The civilian nature of refugee camps has to be respected. I wish to thank the Secretary-General for emphasizing that aspect.

All the acts I have described have been committed by the Republic of Rwanda against Burundi. The Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo has reported those facts, joining other institutions and States. The youths arrested in the course of their lost battle of Kabarore, on 10 July 2015, have given extensive details of their journey from the refugee camps to the battlefield, through training camps inside Rwanda. The security authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have also arrested some youths who, along with deserters from our army and Rwandan nationals, were using the eastern territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to launch their attacks against their country.

Urgent action is needed. Burundi has already turned to the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, which at least twice decided to deploy to Rwanda the Expanded Joint Verification Mechanism with a fact-finding mandate. That mission is yet to be authorized by Rwanda. On the other hand, our Government will soon turn to international courts on that very serious threat. The required Security Council action is of course without prejudice to the right of the State of Burundi to enter into a litigation process.

I wish to reiterate my country's full commitment to, and support for, the United Nations Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework for 2016-2017. Burundi offers its full cooperation for the fulfilment of the road map therein proposed. It is our wish that point 5 of the road map cater to the Burundian refugees, whose return should be facilitated. We stand ready to work together with the Office of the Secretary-General in that regard.

Finally, my delegation wishes to remind all our partners that a selective assessment of the situation in the region cannot help. Some talk today, in 2016, in the way they used to refer to African countries in the 1950s, giving orders to fully sovereign nations. By all standards, it is absolutely unacceptable that some appoint themselves as judges over our countries. Burundi is not a colony of any country. As I said earlier, our country vows cooperation, not subjugation. All the African initiatives to address the situation in Burundi should, in our view, be respected and encouraged. We cannot accept undue interference in those initiatives. The facilitator of the inter-Burundian dialogue is a former President, who deserves respect, not injunctions on how he should conduct his business.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Augusto Ernesto dos Santos Silva, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Portugal.

Mr. Silva (Portugal) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): It is with great pleasure that for the first time I address the Security Council on behalf of Portugal in this timely initiative of the Angolan presidency. I welcome the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General and of his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region to support the stability, peace, security and development of the countries in the region. In that connection, we welcome the United Nations Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework 2016-2017. We acknowledge with satisfaction the establishment of a road map of priorities by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, as well as the six pillars of action selected, all corresponding to areas we recognize to be crucial for adequately tackling the most important challenges in the region.

Portugal, both nationally and as member of the European Union, has supported and will continue to support the efforts of the countries in the Great Lakes region in their processes of national reconciliation, democratic consolidation, social and economic sustainable development and the promotion of respect for human rights, in accordance with the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, agreed in Addis Ababa in 2013.

We have been following the situation in Burundi with particular attention and concern. We commend the efforts of the East African Community, the African Union and the United Nations to promote an inclusive dialogue. We believe that is the only valid path to avoid an escalation of the conflict and further deterioration of the human rights situation in the country.

The Arusha Agreement, which is still in force, is a good example of an African solution to an African problem. We hope that the current conflict will be solved through inclusive political dialogue. The deployment of 200 military experts and observers of the African Union to the field is an important positive step.

There has been progress on security in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, progress in the implementation of the Nairobi Declarations has been slow, with the persistence of tension and the presence of armed groups in the country. In that context, we commend the recent agreement that enables joint operations of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo/United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) against the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda. It is therefore crucial to ensure strong support for MONUSCO and to promote its closer collaboration with the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We highlight the importance of the strategic dialogue between the United Nations and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo with regard to the MONUSCO exit strategy, which, in our view, should be a gradual process based on progress on the ground.

It is urgent to ensure the inclusiveness and representativeness of the national political dialogue within the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Any changes in the constitutional framework that do not garner the necessary political consensus represent a risk factor for the country's stability, with potential negative repercussions for the entire continent.

The repeated violations of the ceasefire agreement and the tragic human rights situation in South Sudan are very concerning. All parties must commit with urgency to fulfilling the terms of the Peace Agreement and to establishing the planned transitional Government.

It is also urgent to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those in need throughout the whole region. We therefore call for the unreserved cooperation of all States in the establishment of the conditions required for access so that we can lessen the suffering of refugees, internally displaced people and populations in urgent need of humanitarian aid.

Africa holds a special place in Portuguese foreign policy. Portugal is also firmly committed to effective multilateralism that is based on the primacy of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security. Our motivation is to constantly be a solid partner in solidarity, both bilaterally and within the European Union. We shall continue along that path, in full respect for the principle of State ownership and while recognizing the specific responsibility and role of regional organizations.

We will continue to participate in the efforts being undertaken by the international community aimed at promoting dialogue with the countries of the region, notably through regional and subregional organizations, including the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the East African Community and the Southern African Development Community.

We will promote and support training initiatives on good governance, anti-corruption efforts, the equitable distribution of resources, the empowerment of women and the right to education. We stand ready to develop cooperation in the area of capacity-building, notably on the reform of the security and justice sectors. We will encourage private-sector and civil-society participation in the implementation of projects that promote peace and development.

I take this opportunity to commend the work of Angola in its presidency of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, in which it has promoted efforts for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the development of the region.

Aside from the great challenges in the Great Lakes region, there is great potential for development. Only peace and security can foster the basic conditions for development. Only peace can make it possible to avoid the exploitation of natural resources by warlords and rebel factions. Only good governance and solid institutions will enable transparency in the extractive industries and the implementation of policies to ensure that economic development translates into human development, tangible to all segments of the population. No one should be left behind.

The consolidation of a democratic culture requires stability. I do not mean stability at any price, but rather stability built on strict fulfilment of the constitutional order, the rule of law, transparency and free and fair electoral processes, as well as State institutions that safeguard the interests of the entire population.

In concluding, I reaffirm Portugal's commitment to collaborate with the countries of the Great Lakes region, in the wish that Nelson Mandela's dream of an Africa at peace with itself will become a reality.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Tshibanda N'tungamulongo, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Tshibanda N'tungamulongo (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your accession to the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March. I am also particularly pleased to welcome, through you, a kindred friendly country, Angola, with which the Democratic Republic of the Congo has long-standing, excellent relations marked by the seal of reciprocal trust and respect. Next, I want to thank you for having taking the initiative to organize this important debate on the maintenance of international peace and security and the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region, a theme that reflects the interest that the Security Council has in our region. This meeting allows us to assess the effectiveness of our joint action for peace within our States and between our States, and gives us an opportunity to reflect on ways and means to accomplish that, not just so as to resolve disputes but also, above all, in order to prevent them, with the ultimate goal of bolstering cooperation between the States of the region and thereby usher in an era of lasting peace and stability. Finally, I want to welcome the presence at this meeting of my friends and brothers, Smail Chergui, Commissioner of the African Union for Peace and Security; Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and Said Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, and to commend the way in which they are carrying out their respective tasks.

Today's debate has, above all, the interest of keeping us well aware of the crisis in the region, which, through its unprecedented duration and cost in human lives and the massive destruction of goods and infrastructure and the violation of human rights, not to speak of its humanitarian aspects, constitutes for the leaders and peoples of the African Great Lakes region a test of their sense of responsibility; and for the Security Council and United Nations peacekeeping operations a test of their relevance and effectiveness; and for the world in which we live a measure of its humanity. The participation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in this debate, as in all previous meetings on the topic, reflects a collective awareness of the challenges and our ongoing willingness to work in concert with other regional and international actors to meet the challenges posed and affirm our determination to shoulder our part of the responsibilty to ensure that peace and harmony can return and be consolidated in the region, so that the universality of the principles and values underpinned by the Charter of the United Nations can be shown to be effective and so that the Sustainable Development Goals cease to be an illusion for the people of our country and the peoples of the Great Lakes region.

The recurring conflicts in the Great Lakes region are the result of the convergence of various factors, at the heart of which are the moral and political failings of the elite: the failings of the national elites when it comes to governance, which for a long time has been, and in certain cases remains, characterized by the denial of the fundamental rights of citizens; the patrimonial governance of States and the failure to respect international law, thus opening the path to political instability, social unrest, intercommunal conflicts within States and open conflicts that have engulfed the States of the region. We should also recognize the failure of the elites within the community of nations, which have not always lived up to their historic responsibilities, owing to a lack of courage or to the prevalence of diverging national interests, including at the level of the Security Council. The result has been subjective actions that have been at odds with the rules of international law. Fortunately, despite those failings and their tragic consequences, the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations has always prevailed, and the relevance of the universal Organization has always been there to guide us. The same is true of the aspiration of our populations to better living conditions, as well as the determination of our peoples to control their own destiny, and therefore to protect and preserve their independence and sovereignty, while respecting, at the national level, the rules of good political, economic and social governance and, at the regional level, respect for the international texts to which their States have subscribed.

That is the context where many initiatives undertaken by the States of the region and the international community belong and should be evaluated, including, in particular, the creation of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Great Lakes Region and the Security Council's adoption of several relevant resolutions, including resolution 2098 (2013).

The conduct of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in dealing with all these initiatives has been entirely responsible. Out of respect for the regional and international commitments it has undertaken, it has applied itself to implementing them, as it has done with the Framework Agreement and the Nairobi Declarations, despite the fact that implementation of the latter has been obstructed for some time now by the leaders of the former Mouvement du 23 mars. We therefore remain committed to eradicating all the negative forces and armed groups still active on our territory. This fight, which was initially begun by the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo on its own, and whose results are proof of a power and professionalism that grows daily, has continued with the support and cooperation of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the military operations have been restarted. I should say that this struggle will not end until the negative forces and armed groups have been completely neutralized.

As witnessed by the excellent results we have had so far, my country has shown the same determination in implementing its national commitments by continuing the reforms under way aimed at consolidating democracy and the rule of law and rebuilding the country and its economic and social development. In order to solidify the State's authority, especially in formerly troubled areas, we have not only deployed the National Police, the public administration and the courts but also strengthened them, resulting in a significant reduction in sexual violence. At the same time, the decentralization provided for by the Constitution has been consolidated through the enactment of a series of laws needed to implement it, by the creation of 26 new provinces and the election, to be held at the end of this week, of new provincial governors and vice-governors.

Where the elections are concerned in particular, it is important to emphasize that we are determined to hold them on schedule, but above all in conditions that will ensure their transparency, credibility and especially peace. In that context, the Independent National Election Commission has been completely reformed and, led by a new team made up of representatives of the majority party, the opposition and civil society, is actively preparing for elections, with one of its priorities being the revision of the electoral register. In order to overcome any obstacles to the process and prevent post-election crises, the Head of State has invited the political classes and civil society to an inclusive political dialogue aimed at achieving a consensus on all the issues dividing them ahead of time. In our view, that is the only smart way in the circumstances, far more so than any unilateral Government decision or solution imposed from outside. We welcome the support to the dialogue provided by the international community.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's strong involvement in the implementation of regional and international agreements is unfortunately not enough on its own to end the damage done by the negative forces and armed groups, still less to create the conditions needed in the Great Lakes region for peace, stability and prosperity. To do that, and to bring about positive, real and lasting change there, it is essential that the following five factors come together.

The first is that the other States signatories to the various relevant regional and international legal instruments must also be individually required to implement them and to report periodically on that implementation, particularly concerning respect for each State's sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, the promotion of democratic practices, and non-assistance to negative forces and armed groups.

The second is that all States must be sincerely and actively involved in combating those forces and groups, as well as the illegal exploitation of natural resources, within a framework of genuine cooperation on the diplomatic, security and judicial fronts.

The third is that legitimate and necessary promotion of the rule of law and democracy in the States of the region must not be conducted at the expense of the demands of peace and stability, without which there are no real prospects for lasting improvement in the overall situation.

The fourth is that without prejudice to the universality of the principle of good governance, each State's individual circumstances, in terms of challenges and also in efforts made and results obtained, should be taken into account in evaluating its internal situation and the importance of continuing support to it.

The fifth is that policies that incentivize private investment and regional cooperation should be implemented with the aim of achieving balanced and integrated development in the region and thereby providing better job prospects and decent incomes for the countries' populations, particularly women and young people. In that regard, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo welcomed the holding in Kinshasa on 24 and 25 February of a conference on private-sector investment in the Great Lakes region. Opened ceremonially by the President of the Republic, the conference was honoured by the personal presence of the Secretary-General and other high-level representatives of the worlds of politics and business from the Great Lakes region and elsewhere. It set the stage we need for peaceful coexistence and shared prosperity in the region by identifying a number of integrational projects in areas such as tourism, with the mountains, landscapes and beautiful locations that abound in Africa's Great Lakes region making it a naturally attractive tourist area. The same applies to the energy sector, with the methane gas that countries in the region have in common and the multiple watercourses that represent possibilities for hydropower development that are just as real. The prospects are similar for development projects for the transport infrastructure that is essential to the stimulation of cross-border trade, intraregional commerce and the economic growth of the countries of the region.

In conclusion, we should acknowledge that war and armed conflict are at the root of the distressing situation in the region, with its legacy of destruction of the economic fabric, of loss of human lives, including 6 million Congolese and of the erosion of mutual trust between the States of the region and their leaders. Whatever the wounds and horrors that have resulted from past suffering, of which we are all aware and which we do not minimize, we cannot stay trapped in dead-end positions indefinitely. That is why we must promote reconciliation and cohesion within our States and peaceful coexistence and cooperation between them. Our history and geography require it, as do the demands of survival and sustainable development. Others before us, in other places, have endured tests similar to ours. Without forgetting anything that had happened, they were still able to renounce indefinite reckless vengeance and a resort to force rather than the force of law to resolve disputes. The prosperity and peaceful understanding of those countries today should be our inspiration.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

Mr. Gasana (Rwanda): I would like to thank you and your delegation, Mr. President, for organizing today's important debate on conflict prevention and resolution in the Great Lakes region of Africa, and for the concept note you circulated to Member States (S/2016/223, annex). I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. His presence here today once again highlights his commitment to conflict prevention and resolution, particularly in our region. And I welcome the briefings by the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, Mr. Smail Chergui, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes, Mr. Said Djinnit, and Mr. Vijay Pillai of the Office of the Vice President for the Africa region of the World Bank.

Conflict prevention and resolution have become central to the work of the United Nations, but in the wake of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the growing intra-State conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, we see that the concept of conflict prevention has been applied more in theory than in practice. The United Nations, especially the Security Council, was and still is much more focused on crisis management than on crisis prevention.

The report (see S/2015/446, annex) of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, as well as the recommendations of the Secretary-General with regard to the Panel's report, rightly acknowledges the primacy of politics with a focus on mediation and conflict prevention. At the same time, it recognizes, among other equally important tools, the usefulness of strong global and regional partnerships in addressing conflicts. Working together with the region in assessing the situation with regard to the implementation of the decisions of the Security Council can also help in addressing the sources of conflict as early as possible. The principles that we support will not bear fruit if they are not implemented in good faith with a cohesive, inclusive and effective strategy that brings on board all stakeholders. That is why early-warning mechanisms should guide the work of the Security Council in preventing conflicts from arising. That would not only improve the work of the United Nations, and of the Security Council in particular, but it could also be cost-effective when it comes to saving lives.

The situation in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa speaks for itself. It is a region that has been in turmoil since the 1950s. While various successive efforts have been deployed, very few of them have been aimed at addressing the root causes of the crisis. For instance, the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region and the peace process in Burundi created hopes that the epoch of violence in the African Great Lakes region was finally drawing to an end. Howevr, progress in realizing those initiatives has been limited, if not disappointing.

With regard to the current situation in Burundi since May 2015, political and security unrest in the country have proved that the Great Lakes region is far from being stable. Burundi is in political turmoil, with State-sponsored armed militias murdering innocent civilians in broad daylight. Moreover, the unverified allegations from part II of the progress update in the January 2016 report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the rumours from Refugees International seek to externalize the responsibility for the current conflict and represent another failed attempt to shift focus away from the real causes of the instability. Rwanda has already demonstrated its obligation to protect and care for refugees. While my Government is committed to meeting its obligations under international humanitarian law, it should not be negatively exploited by those who expect to find solutions to the crisis.

The fact that Burundi has now descended into a spiral of violence has not helped make the case for our collective ability and will to prevent conflict, or to protect civilians. By that I mean that the response from the international community has been geared more towards rhetorical exchanges than actions aimed at preventing the escalation and the commission of mass atrocity crimes. Nor has the response from Burundian officials been better. Instead of exercising leadership and living up to their responsibilities and obligations to protect their own citizens, they have opted to turn a blind eye to the daily killing of innocent civilians, and the carnage continues.

On our side, in order to avoid any misunderstanding of our intentions, we have requested the international community to work with us to plan the orderly and safe relocation of Burundian refugees to third countries. Let me just add that hatred and rhetoric directed against my country, or against my President, are unacceptable. He is our hero. Do not ever dare — ever — to treat him that way.

The persistent presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo of roaming predators under the name of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) — by the way, the FDLR are also in Burundi today, working with the Government of Burundi, which started the crisis — and the inaction on the part of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in implementing the decisions of the Security Council, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Southern African Development Community have raised serious concerns about the commitment of the stakeholders to seeking sustainable peace and stability in the region. While we will welcome the transfer of Ladislas Ntaganzwa yesterday from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we can only note that nothing tangible has been achieved so far on the ground when it comes to dealing with the FDLR. Rwanda deeply deplores the lack of meaningful action in the neutralization of that genocidal group and terrorist organization, including its leadership. It is unfortunate that the international community, especially MONUSCO and its Intervention Brigade, has not followed through with any military action after the defeat of the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23), as called for by the regional bodies and the Security Council. When we served in the Security Council from 2013 to 2014, we voted for resolution 2147 (2014).

The President's concept note (S/2016/223, annex) for this open debate also highlights the linkage between natural resources and the forces of destabilization and conflict. Without a doubt, natural resources have served as the backbone for the efforts of countries so endowed to advance their development agenda and to lift their citizens out of poverty. In some parts of the world, including the Great Lakes region of Africa, those resources have been a blessing for some and a curse for others. Many resource-rich countries remain in abject poverty and continue to experience poor economic growth — and, consequently, a lower standard of living. The argument that the more resources a country has the greater its economic growth and prosperity will be does not necessarily hold true, just as it does not necessarily hold true in marriages. The illegal exportation of resources can be a factor in prolonging — and, in some cases, fuelling — conflict, both in the areas of exploitation and, at times, across the borders with neighbouring countries. Armed groups in our region, such as the Allied Democratic Forces, the Mai Mai, the Lord's Resistance Army and the genocidal group FDLR, have benefitted from the illegal exploitation of resources in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to cause insecurity in neighbouring countries, including in mine.

The Government of Rwanda has set up verification mechanisms that help to identify the origins of mineral resources on its territory. Rwanda is one of the most advanced countries in the region in the implementation of the ICGLR certification mechanism. That was confirmed at a meeting of the ICGLR on the fight against the illegal exploitation of natural resources held in Kigali in November 2015.

The country's Geology and Mines Authority has set up a mineral tagging and sealing scheme, which aims to curb illegal trading of conflict minerals such as tin, tantalum and tantalite. The project, called the ITRI Tin Supply Chain Initiative, was set up by the United Kingdom tin industry to assist countries in the region, and the Government of Rwanda ensures that minerals from Rwanda are verified and traceable right from their source to smelters. We encourage counties in the region to adopt similar measures, which will contribute to the transparency of mineral trading in the region.

Allow me, before I conclude, to respond to the remarks made by Ambassador Samantha Power and her analysis of the situation in four countries of the region, including my own. I hope she is watching this on the webcast. If not, I ask that the message of Rwanda be conveyed to her. First, I hope that she does not confuse her name with her assignment — Ms. Power does not have power over Rwanda.

In reaction to her remarks, we need first of all to caution her against lumping together the approaches of the four countries. There is no one-size-fits-all solution in responding to the challenges confronting the region. While we commend her remarks as to the positive trajectory achieved by Rwanda in the economic and social fields, and as to Rwanda's key role in the maintenance of peace and security in the international arena, there is a need to emphasize that Rwanda's achievement did not occur in a vacuum. Indeed, the success Rwanda encountered stemmed from many factors, including good governance and an enlightened leadership — led by His Excellency President Paul Kagame — that single-handedly put together solutions tailored to the Rwandan situation in the immediate aftermath of the genocide against the Tutsi. Had it not been for him, I would not be here talking to the Council today.

Would the Council like me to tell my story, about why we Rwandans want him? My grandparents were refugees. My parents were refugees. I was born as a refugee. Luckily, President Kagame went back home and stopped the genocide. Luckily, I went back home, too. In 1994, when over 10,000 people were killed on a daily basis, what did the Security Council do? Nothing. Nothing! We want that man there. He was the only one to take up his responsibility and come and stop the genocide. He is our hero.

As I was telling a gentleman in the Chamber, we will never, ever accept anyone who tries to deny what the Rwandans want to achieve, or what Rwanda chooses. Drawing lessons from the bad politics that led to the genocide, it was imperative for the Rwandan people to build on a culture of ongoing dialogue with all citizens of Rwanda so as to enable them to have a voice, to participate, to redress any attempt to hamper their well-being and to have an opportunity to claim their rights when they feel their leaders are not responsive. With that approach, pluralism has been deepened in a consensual democracy in which citizen-led consultations have yielded tangible results in mending the social fabric and in addressing all issues of concern.

Citizens of Rwanda have been afforded numerous platforms to convey their views and concerns. Rwanda understood, as a vital element, that the only way to consolidate gains was to stay connected through a participatory democracy that enables people to have a voice in all matters concerning their well-being. That well-tested system has prompted the people of Rwanda to opt massively to keep this very precious man — the President we have today, namely, President Kagame — at the helm of the nation.

If Rwanda has made the most progress in the world in terms of human development over the past 25 years — as Ms. Power stated well — it has done so through the President's leadership. We know what is good for Rwanda and Rwandans. One does not really have to agree with us, but one can respect our choices.

There are some aspects of her country with which we do not agree, but there is nothing we can do about it. We leave it to them.

What we cannot agree with is this apparent desire to occupy our political space. No one will ever come to occupy our political space. It belongs to Rwandans and only to Rwandans. If a democracy is for the people, by the people, as she and her country's leaders have well stated, then please let the people of Rwanda have their own choice. Attempting to ensure the peace and stability of the country without taking into account the political, economic and historical factors would be a mere exercise that leads nowhere. We in Rwanda came to the realization that it has to be an ongoing process of education and dialogue with the people. It cannot, by any means, be a cut-and-paste exercise from one country to another; nor can it follow the same pattern, as a country's issues are unique to it.

In conclusion, let me reiterate my call for the Security Council to shift from a culture of reaction to one of prevention. With unfolding events in Burundi — and elsewhere, of course — it is inevitable that the Security Council try to improve its record with regard to fully understanding early warning signs of conflicts and responding through early action if it is to remain relevant. While there has been a huge increase in the level of international preventive diplomacy and diplomatic peacemaking, for the most part by the United Nations and more recently in partnership with regional organizations, those efforts will remain inadequate if they are not followed up by concrete actions on the ground.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, Minister of Defence and Military Veterans of South Africa.

Ms. Mapisa-Nqakula (South Africa): Let me join other speakers in congratulating the Republic of Angola, as President of the Security Council this month, for convening this thought-provoking and timely debate. We also recognize your vital role, Sir, as Chair of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, in steering and leading all the relevant stakeholders towards peace and stability in the region.

South Africa has always recognized the importance and the urgency of peace, security and development in the region. For the Great Lakes region to thrive, regional and subregional organizations, together with the United Nations, should work in a coordinated manner in order to achieve stability.

Following the visit to Burundi of the African Union high-level delegation, led by President Zuma, we are encouraged to note that all the relevant stakeholders, including the Government of Burundi, the opposition and civil society, agreed that an inclusive political dialogue was the only means to address political differences confronting their country. South Africa believes that the people and the Government of Burundi have the ability to overcome their challenges through inclusive national dialogue, as well as through peaceful political means, just as they demonstrated with the Arusha Agreement, which ended the civil war that killed thousands of Burundians.

We also welcome the mediation efforts led by President Museveni of Uganda on behalf of the East African Community, particularly with regard to the need to ensure that all stakeholders in Burundi participate in the inclusive dialogue and actively preserve the gains of the Arusha Agreement. South Africa also acknowledges the efforts by the East African Community in reinforcing the mediation process by appointing the former President of Tanzania, His Excellency Mr. Bejamin Mkapa, to further expedite the peace process in Burundi. We call upon the international community to support the Government of Burundi by making resources available to help make the possibility of peace a reality.

With regard to the issue of natural resources in the region, we are all aware that Africa, particularly the Great Lakes region, is endowed with rich natural resources, as well as fertile land for agricultural purposes, and therefore has immense potential for realizing economic prosperity and development. The Congo River, for example, could provide half the energy needs of the African continent. The mineral resources of the land have the potential to make this region the epicentre of commerce in the African continent.

Unfortunately, its true potential has not been realized, as the subregion has been plagued by endless conflicts. It is perhaps because of the abundance of wealth that it is threatened by instability, because often a paradox exists whereby resource-rich countries are threatened with stagnation, less growth and instability. That is partly as a result of the exploitation of such resources, often by those outside the region. We therefore encourage greater responsibility and national ownership of those resources, good governance and greater investment in order to grow all those sectors of those economies. It is important to realize that peace and stability are dependent on development, and vice versa.

The Republic of South Africa wishes to make the following observations and remarks pertaining to the situation in the Great Lakes region.

First, South Africa recognizes that there has been a relative improvement in the security situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo through a reduction of the threat posed by Congolese and foreign armed groups. Secondly, we acknowledge that not all the negative forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have been disarmed. Thirdly, we further recognize that some negative forces have found refuge in neighbouring countries and that efforts to realize their repatriation are under way. Fourthly, we are concerned about the possible broadening of the Islamization of some aspects of the conflict in the region. Fifthly, we note that recently allegations have surfaced of interference in the internal affairs of neighbouring States in the region and that those have been met with counter-accusations.

It is the view of the Republic of South Africa that the total neutralization of the negative forces in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo requires optimum utilization of the military resources deployed in that country. South Africa believes the objective of neutralizing negative forces should not be perceived as implying only the use of force against the armed groups, but also including the application of all possible methods to influence the negative forces to renounce violence as a means of attaining their objectives, and to opt to disarm and demobilize. That would enable the fast-tracking of the process of restoration and consolidation of State authority in the eastern part of the country. South Africa supports the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, taking into account the concerns of the Government of the country.

As the international community, collectively, we need to go back to basics and identify the root causes of the conflict in the Great Lakes region. In addition to the resource paradox mentioned earlier, we should also take into account the interwoven interest groups whose pursuit of power and natural resources overshadows the importance of developing the area and redistributing the wealth of the land to the people of the region so that they too, as in many societies in the world, can thrive and live a prosperous life.

We also need to provide as much support as possible to those countries as they emerge from crisis in order to prevent a relapse into conflict, which typifies the instability in the region. We therefore call on the Peacebuilding Commission to do everything it can in advocating for assistance for post-conflict reconstruction in affected countries of the region.

South Africa has committed to work towards an African continent that is unified and free, whose people can thrive and realize their true potential as members of the global society. The stability and prosperity of the Great Lakes region is at the heart of that endeavour.

The President: I now give the floor to Ms. Annika Söder, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

Ms. Söder (Sweden): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and my own country, Sweden. Let me also mention that Sweden is presently chairing the International Contact Group on the Great Lakes Region, and I am happy to be accompanied today by our Special Envoy, Ambassador Lena Sund, who is also Ambassador to Angola.

At the outset, let me thank you, Mr. President, for this important initiative, which comes at a critical juncture but also at a moment of renewed opportunity for the Great Lakes region. I would also like to express my appreciation for the valuable testimonies made earlier by ministers from the region, as well as for the briefings by the Secretary-General, the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region.

For too long, tension and conflict have been far too common in the Great Lakes region, resulting in suffering for millions of people. We need to do more than just manage crisis and its consequences. We need to collectively support and strengthen international and regional efforts to prevent conflict by addressing the root causes of conflict. That includes a wide range of issues, such as socioeconomic needs, climate change, good governance and human rights, just to name a few, all of which are fundamental elements for building sustainable peace, long-term stability and development. The now three-year-old Peace, Security and

Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region includes such a broad agenda. It recognizes that peace and development are two sides of the same coin and has tangible plans and actions of fundamental importance to reduce fragility in the region. Let me touch upon three areas that we believe deserve particular attention.

First, with regard to the role of regional organizations, the Nordic countries have consistently advocated for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations, because local ownership is a precondition for legitimacy and effectiveness in peacemaking, as well as in facing other challenges. We welcome and support the increasingly important roles played by the African Union and subregional bodies in the context of the Great Lakes region, in particular the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). We encourage their stronger partnerships and their institutionalized collaboration with the United Nations.

Secondly, the lack of jobs and economic opportunities fuel conflict. We have already recognized that only in partnership with the private sector will we be able to realize the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and advance the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. We are therefore encouraged by the Private Sector Investment Conference for the Great Lakes Region, which was arranged jointly by the United Nations and the ICGLR last month. The role of the World Bank and the African Development Bank in promoting economic growth should also be recognized.

It is important to note that Governments and businesses have a responsibility in securing decent work conditions, combating corruption and promoting human rights and environmental standards so that economic growth leads to sustainable economic, social and environmental development. The importance of good governance and predictable framework conditions for investments and private sector development cannot be emphasized enough. Let me echo what Said Djinnit said earlier about the importance of how natural resources can serve countries and peoples and not become a scourge or continue to be one. The region has much potential. There are ample opportunities for economic growth and job creation.

Thirdly, on the role of women, we emphasize the importance of the full and active participation of women in the prevention, the management and the resolution of conflicts, as well as in post-conflict efforts and cooperation. In the experience of the Nordic countries, the genuine participation of women in all aspects of life, in all aspects of peacemaking, is an indispensable foundation for sustainable development. The Great Lakes region has shown leadership in ensuring women's participation in decision-making. In that particular regard the example of Rwanda stands out, with now around 50 per cent women members of Parliament.

Let me turn to the developments in Burundi. We remain deeply concerned about the reports of violence and the risk that economic decline could become an additional driver of the crisis. We welcome the strong regional leadership by the East African Community and the African Union, President Museveni and former President Mkapa, with the support of the United Nations. We were pleased to learn that the African Union and the Government of Burundi have agreed to increase the number of human rights and military observers. Impartial monitoring can help clarify allegations and ease tensions, and thereby prevent the escalation of the conflict and help create an enabling environment for dialogue. We believe that a political solution can be found, and strongly encourage all parties to refrain from using language that will encourage divisions along ethnic lines.

Let me conclude by emphasizing that the Nordic countries will remain committed to the people of the Great Lakes region. That commitment goes back to the 1960s, when the then Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld so tragically paid with his life when trying to make peace in the war-torn region. We now look forward to cooperating with the country to realize the great potential of the Great Lakes region.

The President: Once again, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): Let me thank the Secretary-General; the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Said Djinnit; the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, Smail

Chergui; and Vijay Pillay of the World Bank for their insightful remarks.

Italy aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Italy welcomes today's debate and connends Angola for this initiative. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said last month during the Private Sector Investment Conference for the Great Lakes Region in Kinshasa,

> "We are in the heart of Africa. This region can be an engine for development and economic growth."

Africa today is a land of opportunities. We see the progress that is being made in West Africa, in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere. The African continent needs economic cooperation and economic partnerships. That is also true for the Great Lakes region, where we must support the countries of the area to build an environment conducive to better prosperity based on the rule of law and accountability in upholding the rights of the individual, the prevention and management of violence and tensions, support for the plight of refugees and internally displaced persons and economic powerment at the local level.

Today's debate is rightly focused on conflict prevention and resolution — the link between peace, security and development and the promotion of sustainable business models that will create opportunities. Italy's partnership with Africa is built on the same pillars. That partnership will be further consolidated during the Italy-Africa ministerial conference to be held in Rome in May.

Political stability is paramount if the Great Lakes region is to achieve sustainable peace without relapsing into conflict. Although each situation is different, there are some common principles.

First and foremost is national ownership, without which no sustainable solution can be achieved or imposed from the outside.

Secondly, with regard to strengthening the role and the commitment of regional and subregional organizations, we welcome the appointment of the African Union Envoy to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Edem Kodjo. We stand ready to support his efforts to facilitate a political dialogue that will lead to inclusive and transparent elections within the framework of the Constitution. With respect to the situation in Burundi, Italy supports the initiatives of the United Nations, the African Union, the East African Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, all of which could help foster a political solution in the spirit of the Arusha Agreements and help the country in its stabilization efforts.

Thirdly, on prevention, revitalizing and implementing Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations is the key. The two visits by Security Council members to the region in the past 12 months were a positive step towards building a culture of prevention rather than reaction. The Peace Building Commission also has a positive role to play in promoting peace in the region. Among the preventive tools at the disposal of the Council, let me also mention the ad hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa, which is chaired by Angola and which we support. Political and regional stability will, in turn, allow to tap into all of the available resources to achieve sustainable development in the region. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union Agenda 2063 are the blueprint.

With respect to economic development, the management of natural resources must be sustainable and benefit communities. Extractive industries in particular should be managed soundly. By doing so, we will also combat international criminal networks that are profiting from illegal trafficking. In turn, that phenomenon fuels other illegal activities, such as the trade in small arms and light wapons. Eliminating the one of thee causes of conflict while increasing State revenues is crucial. For these reasons, Italy supports the initiative of the Angolan mission in the framework of the Kimberley Process and was pleased to co-sponsor resolution 70/252, which is a significant General Assembly resolution on the matter.

In conclusion, Italy welcomes the United Nations Regional Strategic Framework for the Great Lakes. Together with the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, it is the best road map for common progress, with local ownership and a clear set of commitments and benchmarks at the international, regional and national levels.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Auza (Holy See): The Holy See commends the presidency of Angola for bringing the subject of the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the African Great Lakes region to the attention of the international community.

Pope Francis, during his visit to the Great Lakes region last November, found inspiration in the motto of the Central African Republic that exults the values of unity, dignity and work. The Pope sees in this triad an expression of the aspirations of each Central African country, and indeed of each of the inhabitants of the Great Lakes region.

The region continues to suffer from decades of multiple local and regional conflicts fuelled by, among other things, political instability and poor governance, corruption and extreme poverty, ethnic divisions and the exploitative use of the abundant natural resources. My delegation believes that the three values of unity, dignity and work are pillars of any prosperous society and thus could greatly facilitate solutions to the complex of causes of armed conflicts and underdevelopment in the region. No solutions to the region's many problems will be possible if there are divisions instead of unity, grave violations of human rights instead of respect for the dignity of each person, and extreme poverty instead of dignified work for all.

Unity is a cardinal value for the harmony of peoples in all their diversity. It drives away the fear of the other tribes and communities. It recognizes the plurality of political views and religious beliefs. It eschews the corruption and greed that endanger justice and solidarity. However, translating the fundamental value of unity in diversity into reality is a constant challenge that demands creativity, generosity, self-sacrifice and respect for others. With respect to dignity, mutual respect and solidarity are possible only if everyone recognizes the inherent and equal dignity of all. Finally, with respect to labour, decent work for all would greatly improve the lives of those in the region.

Addressing the Central Africans in Bangui, Pope Francis exhorted all the countries of the region to improve themselves by wisely exploiting the natural resources that make the region one of the two lungs of humankind on account of its exceptionally rich biodiversity. The international community must support the countries of the region in preventing the abundant natural resources from becoming a curse instead of a blessing, from being exploited in favour of a privileged few instead of remaining the common good of all. It is no doubt superfluous to underline the capital importance of honest administration on the part of public authorities.

Stable and legitimate Governments require electoral processes that are free, credible, inclusive and transparent in order to discourage the recourse to arms. Governments and all stakeholders in the region must be helped to negotiate and deal with the various issues at stake in the most impartial way possible, having in mind only the common good of all citizens.

The region has been destabilized by the vast proliferation of arms and armed groups fighting in the territory. These groups must be persuaded to disarm and commit themselves to cooperating in the development of their respective countries. The international community must assume a larger role in programmes aimed at controlling the legal and illegal arms trade. The Holy See expresses deep appreciation for the countries that have already committed themselves to this path.

A greater investment in preventive diplomacy must accompany all efforts. The priority of the diplomatic activity of the Holy See in the Great Lakes region and elsewhere is preventive action geared towards safeguarding the inviolable dignity of every human person, protecting fundamental human rights, promoting education and health care for all, and fostering the identity of peoples. The grave problem of the recruitment of youth and children by armed groups and terrorist organizations must be made to decisively contrast with investments in both education and job opportunities that offer the young hope for a better future.

Pope Francis expresses deep appreciation for all that the international community and the regional organizations have been doing and calls upon all to continue along the path of unity, dignity and work to help the countries in the region achieve disarmament, prosperity and sound administration at all levels.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): I would like to congratulate Angola and Foreign Minister Chikoti on having organized today's open debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes

Region, and the representative of the World Bank for their briefings.

The Great Lakes region of Africa has been tragically plagued by a long history of violent struggles and conflicts. As stated by the Secretary-General in his latest report (S/2016/232), the Great Lakes region, 22 years after the Rwanda genocide, continues to face major political, security and humanitarian challenges.

In February 2013, in Addis Ababa, a series of commitments to addressing some of the root causes of instability in the Great Lakes region were agreed by the signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, under the auspices of the United Nations, the African Union, the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African Development Community. This Framework remains a key reference for a comprehensive solution to the crises in the region. However, its implementation, as that of the Nairobi Declarations, remains fraught with challenges. As the Secretary-General declares in his last report (S/2016/233) on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), it is essential that the signatories of the Framework honour their commitments in order to achieve sustainable peace in the Great Lakes region.

More specifically, we highlight the fact that all 13 signatories of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework have agreed, among other commitments, not to interfere in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries, to respect their sovereignty, territorial integrity, legitimate concerns and interests, in particular regarding security matters, and to neither tolerate nor provide assistance or support of any kind to armed groups. Regional interventionism has contributed to destabilization in the area and should not be allowed to take place, as it violates both the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework and international law, perpetuating instability.

The situation of refugees and internally displaced people remains worrisome. The already fragile humanitarian situation has been aggravated by the recent influx of 245,000 refugees from Burundi into neighbouring countries. Their status and rights should be fully recognized and respected. Reports that some of them have been recruited by armed groups give rise to serious concern.

We welcome the recent general elections in Tanzania, the Central African Republic and Uganda. We also take note that there are political questions related to elections that remain unresolved in some countries of the region. Notwithstanding the support of the international community to find solutions, we underline the need to respect national ownership in the outcomes of these discussions.

The region of the Great Lakes is endowed with abundant natural resources. The illegal exploitation and traffic of these resources has for years helped finance armed groups in the region, as stated in more than one United Nations report. This illegal exploitation also contributes to hindering the development of the affected countries. To give a sense of the dimension of the problem, in its report of January 2014 (S/2014/42, annex), the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo came to the conclusion that 98 per cent of all the gold produced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was smuggled out of the country. It is therefore important to find ways to transform the natural wealth of the region into a driver of sustainable development. In this regard, the promotion of responsible extractive industries and the building of national capacities and legal institutions are key. Considering the broader question of sustainable development, the private sector can play an important role, as illustrated by the Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference, held in Kinshasa last February.

Brazil has cooperated with conflict resolution efforts in the Great Lakes since the beginning of the involvement of the Organization in promoting peace in the region, having contributed troops to the United Nations Operation in the Congo from 1960 to 1964, and more recently, through the designation of General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz as Force Commander of MONUSCO from 2013 to 2015. Presently, Brazil contributes officers to two United Nations Missions in South Sudan — the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei and the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan — and to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic.

Brazil has also contributed to mitigating the effects of the conflicts in the Great Lakes region with humanitarian donations and cooperation with countries of the region. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we have financed initiatives aimed at assisting victims of sexual and gender-based violence and in combating impunity. Brazil has also partnered with UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme and civil society organizations in an innovative project that allowed hundreds of children formerly linked to armed groups in the North Kivu region to be socially reintegrated through the practice of the Afro-Brazilian martial art known as capoeira.

As the current Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women, allow me to reiterate the importance of the participation of women in political processes related to peace, the protection of civilians, reconciliation efforts and the establishment of a protective environment. Allow me to acknowledge the political leadership exercised by women in the region, and in particular the high percentage of women in the Cabinet and Parliament of Rwanda.

Strategies that do not address the root causes of conflict are unlikely to produce lasting peace in the region. The complexity of the conflicts in the Great Lakes region demand a comprehensive approach towards sustainable peace, focused not only on prevention and the primacy of politics, but also combating the illicit flow and illegal exploitation of natural resources. That comprehensive approach should, among other initiatives, contribute to addressing the need for eradicating poverty, promote socioeconomic development, build institutions, provide access to justice and create more inclusive and reconciled societies. Those strategies should be carried out in close coordination with national authorities and their established priorities, always respecting national ownership.

Two of the six current country-specific configurations of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) — Burundi and the Central African Republic — are related to what takes place in the Great Lakes region. My delegation believes that the Peacebuilding Commission, encompassing members from the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, can have an important role in preventing the relapse into conflict in the region. It is important to bear in mind that peacebuilding is a task that reaches beyond the security agenda and encompasses the entire United Nations system. In that regard, we reiterate the need for strengthening the relationship between the PBC and the Security Council, with a focus on our collective engagement with the promotion of sustainable peace in the Great Lakes region.

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Vervaeke.

Mr. Vervaeke: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia, align themselves with this statement.

Upon your request, Mr. President, I will deliver a condensed version of my statement.

I am very pleased to be taking part, also on behalf of the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, in this meeting on the situation in the Great Lakes. Holding this meeting in the presence of the Secretary-General and several Foreign Ministers of the region is a testament to the importance attached to this region. I would also especially like to welcome the impetus given by the Angolan presidency of the Security Council to this subject.

The European Union has been deeply engaged in the Great Lakes region over many years. Our consistent belief has been that a transition from fragility to resilience, and from conflict to peace is achievable, but only with strong local ownership and strong cooperation between the countries of the region.

The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region remains the best blueprint for common progress. The fulfilment of commitments must be more closely monitored, as they address all the key obstacles to long-term stabilization, including armed groups, the illegal exploitation of natural resources, the encouragement of good neighbourly relations, gender-related issues, economic aspects and the encouragement of regional integration and democratic governance. We welcome the efforts of Special Envoy Djinnit and the launch today of the United Nations Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework. The European Union will be using its own financial instruments, both at national and regional levels, to support the Framework.

We have to face the fact that there are still serious challenges before us. In recent years, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has made great progress, but the problem of armed groups remains a serious threat to stability in the eastern Democratic Republic of the

Congo, despite the efforts and sacrifices of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and despite an improving cooperation between them, which we welcome. That is also why we support the position taken by the Security Council in resolution 2211 (2015) that any future reconfiguration of MONUSCO and its mandate should be based on the evolution of the situation on the ground and, in light of progress, in the protection of civilians, stabilization and the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

However, the most critical challenge in 2016 will be to organize free and fair elections in order to consolidate gains achieved. A political consensus is urgently needed on seeking a focused set of steps to deliver inclusive and transparent elections within the framework of the Constitution. The European Union stands ready to support the efforts of African Union Envoy Edem Kodjo to facilitate such a dialogue. The political and financial commitment by the Democratic Republic of the Congo Government to take the necessary steps without further delay to ensure that elections take place as planned will create the environment in which the European Union can support the electoral process.

Resolution 2211 (2015) in its entirety should continue to guide our work. That includes the context of elections, with a focus on the presidential and legislative elections, and the monitoring of human rights and international humanitarian law. Fundamental civic and human rights need to be fully respected in line with international obligations.

The European Union pursues a coherent approach across the Great Lakes region. The importance of ensuring the right political climate for democracy to work applies to all countries in the region, whether in Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Congo, Uganda, Gabon or elsewhere. Inclusive and open societies, democratic transitions and accountable Governments mean stronger societies. Recent elections in the Central African Republic show that it is possible even in a very fragile context.

The situation in Burundi shows how much is at stake. We strongly condemn the violence, from whichever side, which has cost too many lives and made close to 250,000 citizens flee their country. We are supporting all initiatives of the United Nations, the African Union and the East African Community that could help to lead to a political solution within the spirit of the Arusha Agreement. Highest among those in terms of priorities is the establishment of a functioning and inclusive inter-Burundian dialogue mediated by the East African Community. We welcome the recent appointment of former President Mkapa to assist in that process. We call on the Government, as well as the armed opposition, to abandon the logic of violence. The people of Burundi have demonstrated in the past their incredible capacity to transcend divides; all sides should revive that same spirit with determination.

It is also essential that sufficient capacity be given to independent monitoring of the human rights situation in the country, and we especially underline the positive role played by the African Union and the United Nations in that respect. Last week, the European Union adopted a Council decision ending the special consultations we held with Burundi under the Cotonou Agreement. That decision sets out concrete steps that could help to re-establish the rule of law in Burundi and get our relations fully back on track, but they are also specifically designed to support a political solution. First steps have been announced by the Government; they need to be implemented and enhanced.

The state of relations between Burundi and Rwanda and the impact on the unity of the East African Community also demand our attention. We call on all neighbouring countries to contribute to the solution in Burundi.

Angola has shared a concept note (S/2016/223, annex) for the discussion today. It rightly notes the need for a number of support measures to ensure effective implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. The European Union fully supports that focus and stands ready to support it.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Belgium, His Excellency Mr. Frank De Coninck, Belgium's Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region.

Mr. De Coninck (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium commends the initiative of the Angolan presidency of the Security Council in convening today's debate on the Great Lakes region.

We subscribe fully to the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union. In our national capacity, I would like to add the following comments on the opportunities and challenges presented by the current situation.

The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region is an essential foundation that has lost none of its relevance for peace in the Great Lakes region. In that regard, we would like to welcome the Regional Strategic Framework for the region that the Secretary-General has just presented. Belgium would also like to express its support for the work of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Said Djinnit.

We welcome the recent holding in Kinshasa of a conference on private investment in the Great Lakes region, which brought together several hundred representatives of Governments, financial institutions and private investors and enabled them to better comprehend the region's enormous potential. It should now receive concrete follow-up.

The situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is still not sufficiently stable, despite bursts of progress. Armed groups, including the Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda and the Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda, continue to threaten the civilian population while committing countless acts of violence. The problem of the ex-combatants of the Mouvement du 23 mars is still unresolved. All those factors hinder economic development, encourage the illegal exploitation of natural resources and illicit trafficking and have a very negative impact on regional stability. However, Belgium welcomed the announcement of the resumption of operational cooperation between the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Congolese army. We hope that they will be able to speedily neutralize the main armed groups. That issue should be kept in mind when considering the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate.

The issue of refugees in the countries of the region is another major concern. The presence of approximately 250,000 Burundian refugees in neighbouring countries is not only a tragedy for those affected but also an additional threat to regional stability.

For more than a year now, Burundi has been beset by an internal crisis involving unacceptable violence and numerous violations of human rights. The recent measures taken by the Burundian Government to calm the situation are certainly a step in the right direction, but they should be expanded and rendered irreversible. We believe that only an inclusive dialogue, mediated from outside, is capable of bringing the factors required for a lasting solution to the serious crisis facing the country. We hope that the efforts of the East African Community, the African Union and the United Nations can converge to achieve a political solution in the spirit of Arusha. We welcome the appointment of former President Mkapa as facilitator of the East African Community. The dialogue should bring together a significant number of political actors, without preconditions or exclusivity, and should start soon. In that regard, the deployment of a credible United Nations police mission is important to efforts to calm the situation.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has made significant progress over the past 15 years, both in terms of unity and economic and democratic stability. It is crucial for the country and for the whole of Central Africa to ensure that this progress is consolidated and broadened. The Congo is at a crossroads. In that regard, Belgium is very concerned about the political impasse that is becoming entrenched and hardened in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are also worried about the shrinking political sphere and the pre-election violations of human rights that we have seen. For the country to emerge from that impasse, a dialogue between the various political actors is essential. Under regional or international facilitation, it should result in the achievement of consensus on the modalities of organizing free and open elections and on respect for public order, human rights and the Constitution. Belgium hopes that such a dialogue can be launched as soon as possible. MONUSCO should play a role in supporting both logistics and securing the elections that should be better reflected in its new mandate.

In conclusion, Belgium urges the Security Council to keep the situation in the Great Lakes region on its agenda.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): The history of conflict in the Great Lakes region underscores the fact that the trajectory towards peace is rarely linear. Burundi is a prime example. Today a country that had just begun to heal from the wounds of its civil war is again facing renewed conflict. Australia is deeply concerned about the lack of progress that has been made in resolving Burundi's recent crisis, and about the reports of human rights abuses. We call on all parties in Burundi, including the authorities, to take immediate steps to end torture, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Human-rights violations are important early indicators of the potential for atrocity crimes. Respect for human rights must be central to building sustainable peace.

As Burundi's situation demonstrates, regional and international support to sustained political dialogue and early preventive action are key to consolidating peace. Australia welcomed the recent engagement on the part of the Burundian authorities with the African Union high-level mission, the Security Council and the Secretary-General. However, we urge Burundi to also engage, without preconditions, in the mediation talks led by the East African Community. That requires genuine engagement with opposition groups. Critically, mediation talks, together with broader peacebuilding efforts, must be inclusive of all, particularly women, young people and civil society, if they are to address the grievances that fuel conflict.

We note with concern that implementation of the commitments under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region has recently been limited. In that context, we welcome the agreement on the resumption of military cooperation between the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as today's launch of the United Nations Regional Strategic Framework for the Great Lakes, which aims to support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. Australia is particularly pleased that the Regional Strategic Framework outlines practical steps for addressing violence against women and girls in the region. We also commend its focus on ending the culture of impunity by strengthening institutions, empowering civil society organizations and enhancing judicial cooperation.

Ultimately, countries must address the root causes of conflicts, including historical and economic grievances, lack of economic opportunity, scarce resources and competition. In that regard, we would welcome further discussion of the critical role played in regional stability by mobilizing domestic resources and enhancing economic integration. As we know all too well, economic growth and prosperity, particularly when derived from natural resources, can either fuel conflict, as we have seen in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or be a driver of sustainable, inclusive growth. Peacebuilding, particularly in the Great Lakes region, must pay particular attention to improving the management and transparency of natural resources, as well as ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are shared equitably.

The path towards a peaceful, stable society is a hard one, and we have many examples where countries have emerged from conflict only to relapse back into it. Indeed, the history of the Great Lakes region emphasizes the fact that achieving just, meaningful and lasting peace requires sustained effort, from action to prevent and resolve conflict to reconciliation and recovery. Australia welcomes the attention being focused on those issues and I look forward to continuing to work with the Angolan presidency, including in our role as co-Chairs of the peacebuilding resolution negotiations that are nearing conclusion.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Lauber (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for having organized this important debate, which comes at a timely moment.

Within the framework of the ongoing reviews of peacekeeping operations, peacebuilding and resolution 1325 (2000), a broad debate has been developing around the potential of the United Nations and its various bodies in terms of conflict prevention. If we take the cases of the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, we note that both have considerable potential to prevent conflicts. Their respective potentials are very different, obviously, but they are complementary. While the Security Council has a broad range of instruments, including coercive measures to prevent the imminent outbreak or escalation of a conflict, the preventive potential of peacebuilding resides in its long-term, structural and inclusive nature.

Peacebuilding is intended primarily not to be an instrument for conflict management or conciliation, but rather an approach that addresses the root causes of conflict in a society, in close cooperation with national authorities. The goal of peacebuilding is to combat socioeconomic inequalities and the lack of inclusiveness, ideologies of division and post-conflict trauma. It seeks to promote social changes that reduce the risk of a conflict breaking out. Peacebuilding assumes different forms depending on the context and requires a long-term commitment and investment on the part of national actors and regional and international partners. It is to that specific end that Switzerland has for many years supported the peacebuilding activities conducted in the Great Lakes region.

As we all know, the Great Lakes remains a region beset by troubles. The causes and effects of the problems confronting the region are largely of a transnational nature. The illicit exploitation of natural resources, narrow political space and tensions among different social and non-State armed groups are factors that transcend borders and weigh on regional security. A coherent response to the problems of the region therefore requires a regional approach, and we particularly welcome the ongoing commitment of regional organizations and forums.

The regional dimension is at the heart of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Switzerland supports the Framework, especially its goals of peacemaking, the provision of its good offices in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and providing platforms for dialogue, as well as its own expertise. We appreciate the work on implementation carried out by the Framework and trust that we can build on the momentum generated thus far. The Framework is tailored to promote coordination among the various national, regional and international actors. That is why we encourage bilateral and multilateral actors to maintain or appoint special envoys for the Framework, and to provide close coordination and cooperation.

In order to help galvanize the Framework and to encourage a coherent international response to the problems of the region, Switzerland will propose the organization this year of a series of consultations and a public conference with the key actors in Geneva. Coherence between the United Nations, the African Union, the East African Community and other regional and international actors is essential to the success of preventive measures in the Great Lakes region. Our peacebuilding efforts in the region must be coordinated and cannot be confined to simply bringing to an end the grievances of the past. They must also offer a vision of hope to the inhabitants of the region and help create the necessary conditions so that future elections can take place in a democratic, pluralistic and stable environment.

Allow me to conclude by stressing the importance of prioritizing the resurgence of conflicts in the Great Lakes Region. Recent developments show that decades-old conflicts cannot be resolved in the space of just a few years, despite the presence of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the largest and most onerous peacekeeping operation in United Nations history. The grievances of certain groups within the societies of the region and the violations of human rights can easily become drivers of conflict. We must avoid premature disengagement while remaining watchful and ready to react to any events likely to provoke or exacerbate a conflict in the future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): As an observer member of the African Union, we commend the Angolan presidency for convening this open debate, which focuses on the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region. The visits to this region by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon last month and by the Presidents of the Security Council in March 2015 and January 2016 — Ambassador François Delattre of France, and Ambassador Ismael Gaspar Martins of Angola, respectively — demonstrate the determination and commitment of the United Nations system to achieve durable peace, reconciliation and development there. We also acknowledge with appreciation the untiring dedication of Mr. Said Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, and Mr. Modibo Touré, Special Adviser to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region.

To ensure further progress, my delegation recommends a more comprehensive regional strategy on the part of the United Nations system together with the African Union, the European Union and other African subregional organizations, such as the East African Community, the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the Southern African Development Community and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, with financial outlays by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, African Development Bank and donor countries.

I am pleased to inform those present that during the seventieth session of the General Assembly, Kazakhstan and the United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP) signed a cost-sharing agreement for a new project, entitled "Africa-Kazakhstan Partnership for the Sustainable Development Goals". This agreement focuses on providing technical support to the ministries of foreign affairs and other relevant institutions in 45 African countries, including in the Great Lakes region. The project will promote the sharing of institutional experiences and best practices as Governments prepare to take forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1). UNDP is working directly with ministries of African countries to implement this project. Our overall objective is to build on the efforts of these countries to achieve greater State-building, rule of law, good governance, inclusive political processes, and security and justice sector reform, together with the protection of civilians, and the disarmament and reintegration of combatants.

Peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding missions should therefore have well-conceived mandates with achievable objectives, adequate qualified personnel, modern equipment and resources. The efforts of all key actors need to be redoubled to build stability and security, conflict mediation, post-conflict reconstruction, and address the illegal exploitation of natural resources. To that end, we have to envision greater military, diplomatic and development partnerships that go beyond North-South cooperation to South-South and triangular cooperation. My delegation therefore supports the actions of the United Nations, in particular various Council resolutions that concern the region as a whole and its individual countries.

Kazakhstan will join other Member States in taking measures to strengthen political and legal institutions, the holding of elections, State-building, improved land ownership, inter-ethnic reconciliation, refugee resettlement, humanitarian assistance and poverty eradication. Governmental policies must go together with the grass-roots participation of local actors and civil society to bring about a transformational approach that is both structural and relational, the latter for healing, bridge-building and reconciliation. Capacity-building for African organizations must include long- and short-term technical assistance in conducting timely assessments, programming, and monitoring and reporting. This will be possible with enhanced information technology assistance, knowledge management and timely information sharing region-wide, all with a view to combating the illegal exploitation of natural resources, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and the rise of illegal armed groups, ending gender-based violence and ending all impunity and transboundary crime.

We need to work towards ensuring the region's stability, progressive development and achieving human security for all. We therefore stand for the full implementation of the recommendations of the reviews of United Nations peace operations, the peacebuilding architecture (S/2015/490), and resolution 1325 (2000), and, most importantly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1) in the region. This calls for broadening the concept of peace and stability from State-centered security to people-oriented security and from purely military to non-military security, which includes food, water and energy security, which represent important priorities on our path to a non-permanent seat on the Security Council.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, in his statement to the General Assembly in September (see A/70/PV.13), called for transferring 1 per cent of the defence budgets of Member States to the special Sustainable Development Goals Fund, and proposed the adoption of a global strategic initiative plan to end all conflicts on our planet by 2045, the centenary of the United Nations. As terrorist, radical and violent extremist military groups are on the rise in the region and beyond, President Nazarbayev proposed strengthening the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the establishment of a global anti-terrorist network by bringing together existing measures operating under the aegis of the United Nations. We call on all delegations to support these bold and forward-looking approaches.

Development and peace go together, and so we must support the countries of the Great Lakes region in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Kazakhstan is therefore reaching out to countries in Africa through technical assistance with United Nations Development Programme projects. Humanitarian aid is not a solution; we have to invest more in sustainable development. The upcoming World Humanitarian Summit, to be held in Istanbul this May, will provide new insights and a plan of action.

Kazakhstan is committed to supporting progress in the Great Lakes region and throughout the critically important African continent.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van Coorsdrecht (Netherlands): I would like to thank Angola for organizing this debate. The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. I commend today's briefers for their interventions and their outstanding work on perseverance and bringing peace and stability to the Great Lakes region.

The Netherlands is concerned about the renewed threat of conflict and human suffering in the Great Lakes region. A poignant example is the unravelling of the peace process in Burundi during the past year. We have seen how a crisis has emerged after the parties concerned were unable to peacefully agree on the country's democratic future.

The Netherlands has been a part of peace, development and justice in the Great Lakes region for decades. Through our embassies in each country we contribute to peace and dialogue, to accountability and human rights, and to inclusive development. We believe that dialogue is a better proposition for the future than repression or armed conflict. With the United Nations, the Netherlands has supported the inclusive dialogue in Burundi for many years, also at times when very few people believed a solution was possible. We accompanied the complex process of integration and reform of Burundi's security forces. These processes were fraught with difficulties, but through experience we know it can be done. We call on all parties in Burundi to keep these past achievements in mind, to foreswear all violence and to urgently participate in the regionally led inclusive dialogue in a spirit of compromise. As in the past, the Netherlands will stand by Burundi's side as a friend to advise, to support and to assist. We will not let the citizens of Burundi down.

Like Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo now has a choice to either consolidate past achievements or to descend into violence and social unrest. The Netherlands fully supports the efforts of the African Union, through Mr. Edem Kodjo, to bring stakeholders together to seek consensus on the country's future. Electoral unrest is especially dangerous for the fragile situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Aside from addressing the root causes of conflict, it is important that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo resume all cooperation with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in neutralizing armed groups, such as the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, and creating conditions for their effective disarmament and reintegration.

The Netherlands is deeply concerned about the increasing human rights violations throughout the region. Hard-won space for media, human rights defenders and political opposition is being deliberately shut down. Arbitrary arrests disappearances and extrajudicial killings are increasing. We call on all parties to exercise restraint and to look for common peaceful objectives that will benefit all citizens. As impunity is at the basis of recurrent cycles of violence and human rights violations, it is imperative that those responsible for crimes, war crimes, sexual violence and human rights violations be held accountable so that the cycle can be broken and victims can see justice done.

We welcome the United Nations Regional Strategic Framework, which addresses these very same issues. We look forward to continue working with the United Nations and with all parties concerned with a view to restoring stability and a basis for a sustainable future for all in the Great Lakes region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Bonser (Canada) (*spoke in French*): We thank the Angolan presidency for the opportunity to speak on the important issue of preventing and resolving conflict in the Great Lakes region. As Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals clearly indicates, peace and security are indissociable from governance and development. As the citizens of the Great Lakes region know, poor governance, poverty, inequality, discrimination against women and the inadequate management of natural resources can all have destabilizing effects. Canada is deeply concerned about the shrinking political space and lack of respect for constitutional term limits in certain countries in the region and elsewhere. As we see today in Burundi, States that do not allow for open and inclusive political dialogue, respect for human rights or constitutional rule cannot sustain peace.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada also expects countries to ensure that inevitable changes of leadership be timely, democratic and peaceful. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Canada is concerned about the social, economic and political risks entailed if elections are not held as per the Constitution of that country. Canada encourages all actors to work together to overcome the political impasse through a national consensus that reflects the will of the Congolese people.

Regional organizations and the private sector have a critical role to play in addressing the region's challenges. Organizations such as the African Union, the East African Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region are important partners in facilitating agreements, such as the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, to resolve conflicts in the region. Socially responsible private sector investment, particularly in the extractive sector, can form the basis for inclusive growth that benefits all citizens and communities and promotes sustainable peace. It is also important to remember that women and girls are often agents of stability and resilience within their communities, as well as voices for moderation and peace.

Canada is committed to addressing the intertwined challenges facing the region. Through its development assistance, Canada supports inclusive and accountable governance, the empowerment of women and the protection of their rights and sustainable growth. Canada also champions the establishment and safeguarding of responsible mineral supply chains to prevent conflict and ensure that companies, countries and communities can benefit from development of the region's mineral wealth. Only by addressing these challenges can the countries of the region prevent and resolve conflict. Canada remains committed to working with our partners to advance peace and prosperity for the Great Lakes region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): Speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), I would like to begin by congratulating Angola on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and to praise your initiative, Mr. President, to organize this important debate. I also thank the Secretary-General, the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, and the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region for their inputs in this debate.

The Great Lakes region is one of the African regions that are richly endowed with natural resources and, above all, industrious and creative people. It is one of the cradles of human civilization to which many people in Africa trace their origins, and yet the region is still going through some of the worst conflicts affecting the African continent.

NAM believes that it is in the interests of the Great Lakes region, Africa and the wider international community that this area be supported to emerge from violent conflicts and human suffering to embrace peace and stability and engage in economic cooperation, regional integration and development.

Conflicts have impacted heavily across the Great Lakes region, most notably around the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with proxy conflicts contested by regional and international actors, and with the involvement of the largest United Nations peacekeeping mission. The consequences of these conflicts have been devastating for the civilian populations, the infrastructure and services, undermining the development of the entire region.

The attempts made to end these conflicts and establish peace have so far been ineffective, mainly owing to the continued legacy of colonialism and the failure to understand the complex nature of those conflicts and to address their driving forces in a comprehensive manner.

NAM welcomed the signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework in 2013 by 11 countries of the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) as a positive development. Establishing a link between peace, security and development is indeed a crucial element in support of the implementation of this Framework.

We support the decisions of the extraordinary Summit of the ICGLR and its recent Joint Summit with the Southern African Development Community, which took place in Luanda, Angola, in March 2014, to ensure durable peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. NAM also welcomed the establishment of the ICGLR Regional Training Facility on 18 February

2014 in Kampala to fight sexual and gender-based violence in the Great Lakes region.

The implementation of the Framework requires financial resources to assist the countries of the region in the provision of social services for the population, generate more cross-border trade and develop the hydroelectric potential of a region richly endowed with water resources. It also requires coordinated efforts and the sharing of responsibility between different actors and stakeholders in its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. National and regional institutions should be strengthened to help the private sector to increase its competitiveness.

Lack of economic growth, jobs and opportunities create a breeding ground for conflict. The international community and the political leaders of the region need to focus their efforts on creating an environment that is conducive to business operations and investments. To foster an effective strategy for the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region, first and foremost we need to strengthen productive capacities, creating decent jobs and livelihoods, improving economic governance and fostering inclusive development and shared responsibility. The region has the potential to become the engine for economic growth and development for the whole continent.

The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework has faced significant challenges in recent years. NAM hopes that this open debate will provide an opportunity to reinvigorate national and international commitments to its implementation, as well as to mobilize resources and work towards the implementation of the United Nations Development Programme Great Lakes regional strategy.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Couchepin Roger.

Mr. Couchepin Roger (*spoke in French*): The current situation in the Great Lakes region is a topic of considerable concern for the International Organization of la Francophonie (IOF), which has followed with great attention the political, security and humanitarian developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Burundi. That is why, on behalf of the Secretary General of la Francophonie, Her Excellency Ms. Michaëlle Jean, I welcome the holding of this meeting and would like to express our profound gratitude for the opportunity to share with the Council the point of view of our organization on the issue of the prevention and resolution of crises in the Great Lakes region.

The topic of this important meeting is particularly relevant for us in particular because of the mandate that the Bamako declaration envisions in the area of crisis prevention and conflicts within the French-speaking area. This meeting is part of the tireless efforts undertaken by the international community to preserve peace and maintain security and the well-being of the peoples of the region.

First, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the International Organization of la Francophonie is very attentive to the various mediation initiatives aimed at restoring political dialogue at the national level. As the Council is aware, in the framework of the actions that we have carried out to continue consolidating in a lasting way democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the IOF conducted an audit of the electoral rolls in this country in November 2015, and we transmitted the report of that audit to the Congolese authorities. The implementation of the outcome of the audit could contribute to holding inclusive and credible elections within the time frame set out in the Constitution. For this reason, we have also been working very closely with the facilitator of the African union, the former Prime Minister of Togo, Mr. Edem Kodjo, in order to contribute to the efforts aimed at bringing together all political actors around the same table. This should be done in order to make it possible to hold smooth elections rapidly. Trying to reach such an agreement is a priority for our organization.

The situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains characterized by the continuing violence and attacks by armed groups that threaten the security of the peoples living there. We support and will continue to support the actions carried out by the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which are aimed at restoring peace and security in the region.

Concerning Burundi, we have been following with great interest the very encouraging signals recently sent by the authorities of Burundi, in particular the cancelling of the international arrest warrants against 15 dignitaries, including members of the opposition; the fact that amnesty has been granted to several hundred detainees; and the decision to authorize the reopening of certain private radio stations. However, our organization remains concerned by the lack of a truly inclusive political dialogue and the very precarious security situation, as well as the continuing violations of various human rights, including freedom of the press, and the situation of the hundreds of thousands of refugees. We are also concerned about signs that lead us to fear a rapid deterioration in the country's economic situation, and especially since the European Union, whose aid represented about 20 per cent of the national budget, decided last week to suspend its direct assistance to Burundi, based on the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement. The country's economic deterioration can only worsen the serious implications of the current crisis for the people of Burundi.

Based on our findings during my two missions to Burundi in 2015, the country has been under the observation of the Permanent Council of the International Organization of la Francophonie since then. In that regard, we have a duty to ensure that the national authorities are taking concrete steps to reach a solution to the current urgent crisis, and doing so in strict compliance with the Arusha Accords. The welfare of the people of Burundi, and the stability and development of the region as a whole, is at stake, as are the values and principles that we all hold dear and that La Francophonie, in accordance with the provisions of its foundational texts, can never compromise on. La Francophonie is more than ever determined to play a full part in the search for a peaceful solution, together with Burundi's national authorities and all of its partners, including the United Nations, the African Union and the East African Community.

More generally, on behalf of the Secretary General of La Francophonie, I would like to emphasize the impact that crises and instability have on our societies. Instability is the wellspring of all the evils giving the international community cause for concern, with terrorism first among them. We therefore cannot combat terrorism if we do not create conditions that will encourage young people to have hope and confidence in the future. Instability breeds distrust, disillusionment, a loss of moral compass and identity, all of which are what terrorist movements rely on, motivated as they are by hatred and the destruction of the values of peace, justice and freedom. Similarly, we cannot claim to be able to solve the problem of forced migration without directly tackling the root causes of today's crises — whether they are political instability, insecurity, weak institutions, youth unemployment, or a lack of prospects for private and public investors. That is why it is imperative that all of us, without exception, strive to implement concrete measures to help prevent crises and to preserve peace and welfare for all. La Francophonie will contribute to all of those efforts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Imnadze (Georgia): At the outset, I would like to thank the Angolan presidency for convening this meeting, whose topic underlines the importance of ensuring peace and security in the Great Lakes region. I would also like to thank today's briefers — the Secretary-General, his Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, the African Union's Commissioner for Peace and Security and the representative of the World Bank — for their valuable contributions.

Georgia aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the obseraver of the European Union (EU), and in my national capacity I would like to make some brief comments.

We believe that a transition from fragility to stability and from conflict to peace in the Great Lakes region is fully attainable, but only with strong and inclusive national ownership, vibrant cooperation between the countries of the region and a long-term commitment to, and collaboration with, that region on the part of the wider international community, including the United Nations. As those critical conditions are secured, they will ensure that development accelerates and local communities enjoy the full benefits of the extraordinary human, material and natural resources of the Great Lakes region.

The political instability and conflicts in the region have a considerable international dimension, and therefore require a concerted effort to promote sustainable peace and development. In that context, we would like to reiterate our full support for the steps taken by the Security Council and the international community, and we commend the United Nations, the African Union and the European Union for their efforts aimed at stabilizing the situation on the ground, while maintaining full respect for the political independence, national sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States Members of the United Nations.

Peacekeeping continues to be one of the most important activities of the United Nations. It is a significant mechanism paving the way for sustainable security, peace and development in States trying to overcome crisis and destabilization. We also believe in the importance of the Organization's peacebuilding activities in the region, and as a member of the Organizational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission, we fully support the Commission's dedicated efforts to help to improve the situation in the Great Lakes region, including through sharing our own experience of reforming State institutions. We would like to take this opportunity to commend the Angolan delegation, in its capacity as a co-facilitator with Australia, for its important role in the ongoing negotiations for comprehensive General Assembly and Security Council draft resolutions related to the United Nations peacebuilding architecture.

Despite the fact that 20 per cent of my country's territory remains under illegal foreign military occupation, and that hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees from Georgia, victims of ethnic cleansing, are denied the right to return to their homes, we as a country are committed to international peace efforts across the globe. Georgia has extensive experience as a contributor to international security and stability, including on the African continent. In 2014, a Georgian military contingent took part in the EU-led operation in the Central African Republic, whose aim was to support regional and international efforts to restore stability there and to promote a political transformation process. The following year, Georgia continued to participate in the ongoing EU-led missions in the Central African Republic and Mali. As a participant in the world leaders' summit on peacekeeping last September, we continue to look for ways to enhance our support to United Nations peacekeeping.

We find it encouraging that the Pact on Security, Stability and Development, adopted in Nairobi in 2006 at the second Summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, clearly outlines four major areas of cooperation in the region — peace and security, development and good governance, economic development and regional integration, and humanitarian and social issues. I would like to recall that an auspicious turning point in the consolidation of peace and stability in the region was the signing, in Addis Ababa on 24 February 2013, of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region by 11 countries and four important regional and international institutions, and the Security Council's subsequent adoption of resolution 2098 (2013). The full implementation of both the Framework and resolution 2098 (2013) will help to stabilize the situation on the ground and, more important, pave the way for addressing the root causes of the cycle of conflict in the countries of the Great Lakes region.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Council of Georgia's continued commitment to the international community's sustained efforts to achieve lasting peace and security in the Great Lakes region, with the meaningful participation of all interested actors at the local, national, regional and international levels.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Hahn Choonghee (Republic of Korea): I would like to congratulate you and the Angolan delegation, Mr. President, on your presidency of the Council this month, and to thank you for organizing today's very timely and relevant open debate.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region are now at a critical juncture as they move towards a more peaceful and democratic societies based on sustainable development. The lack of consensus on key issues such as the electoral calendar makes it unclear whether the presidential election can be held in November, as the Constitution mandates, in a peaceful and democratic way. The security situation is still fragile, with rising political tensions and ongoing attacks from armed groups like the Forces Démocratiques de libération du Rwanda. Moreover, the economic downturn caused by low international prices for raw materials is undermining the foundation of development and peace.

Against this backdrop, a comprehensive development strategy that links peace, security and development for the effective implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region is essential. In that sense, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's recent participation in the Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference in Kinshasa and the establishment of the United Nations Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework 2016-2017 are highly commendable in that they have created new momentum for this comprehensive approach. The Republic of Korea would like to underline two points.

First, security, political stability, democratic institution-building and governance must be the bedrock for sustainable development. Above all, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo should fulfil its primary responsibilities to protect and serve its own people by undertaking extensive reforms in the areas of security and governance and promoting democratization and reconciliation. In particular, we look forward to seeing tangible outcomes in security sector reform, such as the establishment of a rapid reaction force that can more quickly and effectively engage in conflict and protect civilians. We believe that these efforts will also contribute to materializing the gradual and progressive exit strategy of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We also urge the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the political parties to engage in inclusive dialogue to reach consensus on the issues pertaining to the election process.

Secondly, regional stakeholders should formulate an effective mechanism for sustainable economic development and co-prosperity. In particular, a sound and effective mechanism for natural resource management is essential to break the link between natural resources and conflict, and transform natural resources into a strong engine for economic development and co-prosperity. Regional stakeholders need to develop a model for creating regional or global value chains that exploit, process and export natural resources in a way that helps local, national and regional economies. At the same time, the countries of the region should increase efforts to create a more favourable environment for foreign investments by accelerating economic integration.

The Republic of Korea has made constructive contributions that focus on building the capacity of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the areas of water, public health, and rural development. It has been carrying out various development assistance projects that draw upon Korea's unique experience of having achieved successful economic development within just a half century through, among others, the Saemaul Undong, or New Village Movement. The Saemaul Undong, which greatly contributed to rural development in Korea in the 1970s with community-led comprehensive resource mobilization based on a can-do spirit, can be shared with many other African countries in the context of the contemporary situation. In addition, our sustainable mine development and reclamation training programme for officials of the Ministry of Mines aims to assist the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in developing a sustainable mechanism for natural resource management. We are also running various other training programmes for Government officials of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi in the areas of justice, e-Government and human resource development with a view to lending support to the strengthening of institutional capacity and governance in the region. The Republic of Korea also contributed to the protection of civilians and human rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by providing $1 million of budgetary support to the joint protection teams of the Joint Human Rights Office under MONUSCO in 2014.

Finally, I would like to reiterate my Government's full support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Said Djinnit, and MONUSCO. We appreciate their relentless efforts for sustainable peace and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. The Republic of Korea will continue to play a constructive role in achieving this important goal.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Laassel (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): First, I wish to extend warm thanks to Angola for having taken the initiative to organize this high-level meeting on the situation in the Great Lakes region, and for the quality and timeliness of the concept note before us (S/2016,223, annex). I also thank the ministers here for their presence, which reflects their interest in the region, and commend the briefers for their rich and informative statements.

For two decades now, the majority of the countries of the Great Lakes region have been prey to political instability, lengthy wars and recurring conflict. The succession of crises has had disastrous consequences, resulting in loss of life, population displacement, the destruction of basic infrastructure and the disruption of economic channels. Despite regional initiatives to help resolve these multifaceted crises, populations continue to live in inhuman conditions that are often perceived as a curse to be borne rather than a problem to be solved. This disastrous situation is at odds with the immense riches that abound in the region.

The existence of historically close ethnic, cultural, social and political ties among the peoples of the region, as well as the porosity or proximity of borders, further complicate and exacerbate the situation. Forced population movements, economic malaise and widespread violence, as well as their fallout across borders, exacerbate tensions between States considerably. In the region, borders have become veritable sieves that contribute increasingly to the spread of conflict, as opposed to geographical barriers that act as obstacles to threats to the stability of States.

The commitment of the international community in the region, demonstrated in particular by the Council and by the deployment of the largest United Nations peacekeeping operation, should have made it possible to halt the spiral of violence in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, but the country remains the theatre of clashes among dozens of Congolese and foreign armed groups for reasons based on ethnicity, land or control over significant mineral resources. Here, I would like to mention a worrying trend illustrated by the growing interconnection between the criminal activities of armed groups operating in the Great Lakes region, such as the Lord's Resistance Army, and terrorist groups operating in the Sahel and, more recently, in West Africa. This phenomenon is a threat to the security of the entire continent, for which there is growing evidence.

It is therefore our collective duty to do our utmost to evaluate and analyse the root causes of the tragedy suffered by the region for over 20 years. In our view, with regard to the complex dynamics of the conflict in the Great Lakes region, it is essential to adopt and implement multidimensional approaches centred on the definitive neutralization of negative forces in the region, the effective implementation of regional agreements, the strengthening of political dialogue, the continuation of and emphasis on peacebuilding efforts in the region, the promotion of economic interdependence among the various countries and strengthened coordination of external actors.

The armed groups that remain active in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo are the greatest threat to peace and stability in the region. Lasting peace cannot be restored so long as insecurity persists in the east. Only the timely disarmament of those armed groups will reduce tensions and restore confidence to the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region. To that end, a message of unity and firmness from the international community would help support the efforts of actors who are sincerely committed to the cause of lasting peace in the Great Lakes region.

In that respect, we welcome the recent signing of the agreement between the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations for the resumption of military cooperation between the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the fight against armed groups.

The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region has entered its third year but its implementation remains limited, although we note the existence of several encouraging signals. It is up to the signatories to the agreement to honour their commitments to revitalizing the political momentum created by vthe Framework agreement. It is only through cooperation among stakeholders from across the region that the Framework agreement will pave the way for a concrete improvement in the security situation and living conditions in the Great Lakes region. Moreover, it remains crucial that the signatories of the Framework agreement establish the most appropriate enforcement mechanisms to prevent conflicts, restore peace and enforce agreements.

The implementation of the Framework agreement must be promoted and supervized by the highest organs of the Regional Follow-up Mechanism at the level of Heads of State and Government. Only the involvement of the latter will be able to ensure the necessary political will and sustained commitment of all Member States. I commend the significant progress made by the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the implementation of its commitments under the Framework agreement.

Conflict resolution in the Great Lakes region requires not only resolving security challenges but also addressing their root causes by giving priority to the promotion of good governance and the rule of law. Peacebuilding is the indispensable foundation of political stability and economic development in the subregion, and the role played by the international community is crucial in that respect. It is therefore always necessary for development partners to support and pursue recent initiatives towards democratization by enhancing their intervention strategies. The good functioning of electoral processes is also a key aspect for peace and stability. We must work to ensure a transparent and credible electoral process in countries that organize elections, while respecting the Constitution and the electoral calendar. While the Government is responsible for ensuring that the elections are credible and transparent, the support of the international community remains crucial.

It is important for countries of the region to cooperate in the restoration of peaceful dialogue and cordial relations among States. Any reconciliation and reconstruction initiative in the region requires the stimulation of positive developments to reassure the affected countries that their security and economic interests have more to gain through support for stability and improved relations with neighbours. In this regard, it would be useful for the region to continue regional cooperation in the four key areas of peace and security, democracy and good governance, economic development, and humanitarian and social protection.

If all the region's peoples are to enjoy the dividends of peace, it is essential to promote economic integration as a means to strengthen the links among the countries of the region and to benefit the common interest through the promotion of peace, stability and cooperation. One way to do this is to streamline and strengthen the capacity of existing economic blocs in the region, such as the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries, and to intensify economic integration not only in terms of reduced tariff barriers, but also in such areas as migration and population flows, trade facilitation and investment. Economic integration could also be achieved by promoting cross-border community cooperation initiatives that strengthen the links among local communities in border regions, and allowing them to face challenges and seize opportunities of mutual interest.

Although the Great Lakes region enjoys the sustained commitment of the international community, the latter remains fragmented. Most peace initiatives in the region have not taken account of the complexity of the conflict and its consequences, not only nationally, but also at the regional and international levels. We must therefore continue to exploit synergies and to coordinate initiatives to maximize the contribution of international partners to the implementation of various peace and development initiatives in the region.

We welcome the launch today of the new United Nations Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework 2016-2017, which offers great hope for a better future of prosperity and development in the Great Lakes region, and we call on all stakeholders to contribute to the realization of this ambitious programme of transformation.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Thoms (Germany): I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this debate, which comes at a time when the Great Lakes region is at a crossroads.

Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Major efforts have been made in this traditionally fragile region to fight illegal revenue from mineral wealth and to promote a return to peace. Yet we cannot be sure that these efforts will bear fruit. Germany remains committed to supporting the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and its member States in their efforts to foster peace, stability and development in the region. Since 2004, the German Government has contributed significantly to various projects in the region, wishing to promote transparency and control of the mining sector. The current three-year phase amounts to nearly $30 million.

Germany supports the ICGLR secretariat and in particular the Regional Initiative on Natural Resources, which aims at breaking the link between mineral revenues and conflict financing. At the core of the Resource Initiative is a regional certification mechanism for selected natural resources, namely, cassiterite, wolframite, coltan and gold. In order to embed these efforts in wider peacebuilding activities in the region, Germany is also currently in the process of deploying an expert on the natural resource sector in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

In addition, Germany cooperates with selected ICGLR member States. For example, support is provided to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure the good governance of its mining sector and to implement a national certification system for the artisanal and small-scale mining sector. This project not only addresses the issue of illegal exploitation, but also seeks to promote better living conditions for artisanal miners by improving their environmental and social working conditions.

The link between natural resources and conflict is not the only challenge to the prevailing conflicts across the Great Lakes region. As highlighted by the report of the Peacebuilding Commission, progress in development is also critical to preventing both lapse and relapse into conflict. That is why Germany supports peacebuilding efforts in the Great Lakes region through targeted development cooperation programmes. For example, since 2008 more than $100 million have been disbursed to a peace Fund in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which hopes to deliver a tangible peace dividend to the people of eastern Congo. More than half a million Congolese have already benefitted from the peace fundamental, which finances the construction of labour-intensive infrastructure and activities that stimulate the agricultural sector, all of which will give a boost to the local economy. By focusing on locally relevant drivers of conflict, the peace fund contributes to the implementation of the revised International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Germany also reaffirms its full support for MONUSCO, to which it will continue to provide civilian expertise, and to the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region. We welcome the steps that MONUSCO has taken to increase its efficiency and effectiveness, agree with the assessment that MONUSCO's political role should be strengthened, and look forward to the results of the comprehensive and collaborative multi-phase review. Germany will remain committed to the developments and continue to support efforts to increase peace and stability in the Great Lakes region. This includes our continued strong engagement in opposition to poaching and illicit wildlife trafficking as co-chair, together with Gabon, of the respective Group of Friends here in New York.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. Winid (Poland): I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening today's debate, as well as for Angola's constructive engagement in the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

Poland aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. We would like, however, to provide some additional remarks from our national perspective.

It is widely acknowledged that the Great Lakes region possesses enormous, and largely underdeveloped, potential for growth, which desperately needs to be tapped in order to improve the livelihoods of the peoples of the region. In that regard, I join my colleague from Morocco in welcoming today's launch of the United Nations Great Lakes Strategic Framework for 2016-2017, which should contribute to that goal.

One of the issues Poland considers central to our debate is how best to transition from the initial phase of sustaining peace to long-term socioeconomic development. Key challenges to development in the Great Lakes region are well defined. Poland, with its complicated history, can be a good example of how to conduct a transformation — in our case, from a foreign-imposed communist regime — to democracy, a market economy and an open society. We know what it means to lose independence, what it means to fight for freedom and what it means to rebuild an economy. We are sharing our experience through our special Go Africa programme, which was developed as a bridge between Poland and African continent.

Poland remains committed to support all United Nations activities aimed at conflict prevention and the promotion of dialogue instead of violence. The most pressing concerns have to do with the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, especially in the face of the difficulties following the scheduled electoral process. At the same time, we welcome the positive signals from the Central African Republic, which proves that transition and conflict mitigation can be attained with the consistent involvement of the international community.

We support United Nations efforts with regard to the protection of civilians in the region and beyond. One example of such efforts was the establishemt of a dedicated pillar within the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the context of the protection of civilians, Poland recognizes the great importance of the Kigali Principles, adopted in 2015 and aimed at protecting the most vulnerable. We intend to sign on to the Principles in the near future.

We take note of the leading role of the pan-African and regional organizations in conflict prevention and pledge our full support. Regional organizations are important stakeholders in United Nations activities to address conflicts. It is therefore crucial to explore ways to address issues of a regional dimension, as well as modalities for cooperation and joint programming between regional organization such as the African Unioin, the East African Community, the Souther African Development Community, the Economic Community of Central African States and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

In conclusion, let me stress that we favour the approach of African solutions for African problems. At the same time, we encourage our African friends to increase their involvement in different initiatives and activities within the African Peace and Security Architecture.

The President: I now give the floor to the represenative of Ireland.

Mr. Mawe (Ireland): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's debate, which addresses important issues that deserve our attention and consideration.

I would like to align myself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union.

In my statement, I would like to focus on two issues that are highlighted in the concept note (S/2016/223, annex) prepared for this debate. The first is the role that elections play in contributing to durable peace, reconciliation and development. The holding of regular, inclusive and transparent elections is vital for credible democratic governance. Crucial to the success of any electoral process is the political environment in which elections take place, and creating a conducive environment involves working closely with a wide range of stakeholders.

Unfortunately, the environment in which last July's presidential elections took place in Burundi could not be judged as conducive to inclusive and credible elections. The situation in the country is now characterized by pervasive violence, human rights abuses and forced displacement. We would urge the Government of Burundi, in the interest of its people, to move forward urgently on an inclusive inter-Burundian dialogue, which is essential to restoring peace and stability.

We are also following closely the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, particularly in the light of the upcoming elections in the country. We have taken note of the comments made by the African Union and the United Nations in stressing the importance of peaceful, transparent and timely elections, which would serve to consolidate much of the progress made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo over the past decade. In this pre-electoral period, it is especially important that the rule of law and human rights be respected and that arrangements respect constitutional provisions.

More broadly, we recall that the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance provides clear standards for governance. We urge all Governments in the Great Lakes region, as elsewhere in Africa, to adhere to those standards in order to build truly inclusive and resilient democracies, the foundation for durable economic and social development.

The second issue I would like to address is the critical role of women in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacebuilding and governance. As noted in the three high level reviews in 2015, and at the Security Council debate (see S/PV.7533) held here last October, the participation of women is key to sustainable peace. Women must participate and have an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in all areas of peace and security — as mediators and interlocutors, as peacebuilders and as active participants in economic, social and political spheres. From our own experience of conflict on the island of Ireland, we know first-hand the importance of the promotion and empowerment of women as peacebuilders in opening up a pathway to sustainable peace.

Finally, the Great Lakes region has many examples of the particular impact of conflict on women and girls, including the devastating impact of sexual violence. We remain deeply concerned about grave reports, in both scale and nature, of acts of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as other human rights violations, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular in the east of the country. We are also concerned about reports of sexual violence perpetrated by security forces during house searches in Burundi. Such violations are completely unacceptable and cannot be tolerated. We encourage the authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to further build on progress to combat sexual violence and to continue to work to ensure the full implementation of resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2122 (2013).

Ireland strongly supports the work of Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Said Djinnit and his predecessor Mary Robinson. In particular, we welcome his commitment to promote a participatory approach to the development of gender-related policies. We believe that engaging with a broad range of actors in support of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the

Region offers the best chance for success, and that engaging with civil society will help address all issues surrounding sexual and gender based violence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Albania.

Mr. Nina (Albania): We appreciate the opportunity to take the floor during this open debate on this very important topic. We would like to thank the Angolan presidency of the Security Council for choosing the theme of the prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region, as well as for the very informative concept note (S/2016/223, annex) circulated in preparation for this debate. We would like also to thank the Special Envoy and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for their informative insights on the situation in the Great Lakes region.

Albania aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. Allow me to make the following remarks in my national capacity.

We are deeply concerned about the significant deterioration of the situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where activities by the Allied Democratic Forces and by the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, among other groups, pose serious threats to security in the region and beyond. Furthermore, we regret that civilians are being caught up in the fighting and are being killed, displaced, forcibly abducted or harassed, often on the basis of ethnicity or perceived collaboration with opposing groups — with an estimated more than 500 civilians killed since 2014 and more than 45,000 persons recently displaced.

In that context, we commend the steps and measures taken by both the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the armed forces of the country to strengthen the protection of civilians, and we welcome their improved cooperation. However, further actions are obviously needed towards that fundamental objective, including through increased outreach and early-warning activities in the region.

We furthermore welcome resolution 2211 (2015), which provides that any future reconfiguration of MONUSCO or its mandate be based on the evolution of the situation on the ground and on the protection of civilians, stabilization and the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, including national reforms.

Previous experience in the region has shown that the destiny of each of the region's countries is deeply intertwined with that of its neighbours. The crisis in Burundi has only exacerbated the situation in that context, as worrisome reports indicate that infiltration by armed groups is fuelling further instability. Urgent attention therefore needs to be paid to the regional dynamics of the crisis in order to avoid escalation and regionalization.

The potential for conflict to spread throughout the region should neither be assumed nor ignored, in particular by the Security Council. In that regard, we welcome the steps taken by the United Nations Stabilization Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in ensuring that contingency plans are in place in case of an eventual escalation. While any meaningful resolution will require a creative combination of factors, the countries of the region, supported by the international community, can become key players and have the potential to comprehensively address those regional dynamics before they escalate.

We welcome the holding of the first Great Lakes Private Sector Investment Conference, which took place in Kinshasa on 24 and 25 February and which was attended by the Secretary-General, to provide a platform for a public-private dialogue on promoting responsible investment in the region and enhanced networking opportunities between regional and international stakeholders. However, responsible investment cannot be achieved without addressing the issue of the illegal exploitation of minerals and natural resources. Nowhere is that such exploitation more well-established and more dramatic than in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where that trade is worth an estimated $1.25 billion annually.

Important lessons have been learned in past years by realizing the fact that instability in the Great Lakes countries has been financed by illegal mineral sourcing and trading, prompting concrete measures such as the Regional Initiative on Natural Resources. Illegal exploitation and trade in natural resources in the Great Lakes is very complex. The needed measures to address it should necessarily include actions against impunity, improved governance, reforming security forces, the sustainable management of natural resources and promoting livelihood programmes. By taking those measures, the natural resources of the mineral-rich Great Lakes region will have the potential to become a very powerful tool to achieve durable peace, reconciliation and development.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has made good socioeconomic progress in the past decade, in particular since the adoption of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. The upcoming elections in that country are of a crucial importance. The holding of peaceful, transparent, smooth and timely elections will greatly contribute to consolidating the progress made in the country over more than a decade. The people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo should have an opportunity to have their voices heard through a democratically elected Government.

Albania welcomed the joint press statement of 16 February on the political dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo issued by the African Union, the United Nations, the European Union and the International Organisation of La Francophonie, which emphasized the necessity for an inclusive political dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We urge all Congolese political actors to spare no effort, within the framework of the country's Constitution, to ensure the successful holding of elections, with a view of further advancing the progress made so far.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Plasai (Thailand): Let me first express my delegation's deepest appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this timely meeting. My appreciatiaon also goes to all the briefers for their respective remarks, which reaffirmed the international community's commitment to resolving the conflicts in the Great Lakes region. Today's open debate provides an opportunity to examine the current political situation in the subregion and serves as encouragement to the parties concerned and their international partners to recommit their efforts to address outstanding issues and implement the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

As rightly pointed out in your concept note (S/2016/223, annex), Sir, the underlying causes of conflict in the Great Lakes region are complex and multifaceted. In our view, efforts directed at ending instability and violence alone will be insufficient. We must also look beyond the traditional peace and security dimension and search for solutions to the root causes of conflict. As our contribution to this debate, we wish to highlight the following points.

First, the Kingdom of Thailand believes that peace cannot be sustained in the absence of economic recovery and sustainable and inclusive development. The Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, in our view, provides a suitable platform for concerted efforts at all levels to address peace, security and development in a comprehensive manner. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has committed to furthering economic development. The region has committed to deepening economic integration. And the international community has committed to supporting the implementation of economic development and the regional integration agenda. Therefore, we stress the need for the full and timely implementation of the Framework. We also welcome today's launch of the Great Lakes Regional Strategic Framework 2016-2017, which outlines the United Nations development approach in support of the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework.

Secondly, the Great Lakes Region is rich in natural resources, be it gold, charcoal, timber, wildlife or water. However, such endowment has also been one of the sources of instability in the region. The Security Council has recognized the linkages between the armed conflicts in the region and the illicit exploitation of natural resources by armed groups and criminal networks. That has resulted in a number of sanctions being imposed on targeted individuals. While recognizing the purposes of such sanctions, we are of the view that the Council should take into account potential unintended consequences, such as adverse humanitarian impacts and national economic costs, when imposing natural resources-related sanctions. In addition to stemming illicit exploitation, we are also of the view that effective governance can potentially turn natural resources from being a driver of conflict to a catalyst for development and shared prosperity. Such governance cannot be ensured without the full commitment and participation of the Governments of the countries of the Great Lakes region, the extractive industry and the relevant international actors.

Thirdly, regional and subregional organizations can play a crucial role as partners of the United Nations and the conflict-affected countries in their efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts. We commend the African

Union and the International Conference on Great Lakes Region for their constructive and continued commitment and for their contribution to foster sustainable peace and development in the region.

Fourthly, the effective prevention and resolution of conflicts require the participation of all the relevant stakeholders in the political and peace processes in an inclusive manner. As evidenced in the report (S/2015/716) on the global study on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), only in that way can we ensure the meaningful empowerment and participation of women. As a strong supporter of the women and peace and security agenda, the Kingdom of Thailand advocates a greater role for women at all stages of the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework. We also look forward to further discussing this important issue at next week's open debate on the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflict in Africa.

(*spoke in French*)

In conclusion, allow me reiterate the Kingdom of Thailand's readiness to share with the countries of the Great Lakes region its humble experience and practices on development and on the management of natural resources, as well as on peacebuilding, which could be applied in the context of the region. I also wish to reiterate the Royal Thai Government's commitment to supporting the countries of the region, both bilaterally and multilaterally, in their efforts to achieve durable peace and sustainable development.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.

United Nations

S/PV.7654

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7654th meeting

Wednesday, 23 March 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Gaspar Martins	(Angola)
Members:	China	Mr. Xu Zhongsheng
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Minami
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rossselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2016/233)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2016/233)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Raymond Tshibanda N'tungamulongo, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/233, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I now give the floor to Mr. Sidikou.

Mr. Sidikou (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity personally to present to the Security Council the latest report (S/2016/233) of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and to brief members on the latest developments on the ground.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is at a pivotal moment. Elections should be held towards the end of the year, while political tensions are rising as the polls approach. The electoral process has long been at an impasse, with significant obstacles to be overcome in order to hold the elections. A credible dialogue among all political stakeholders remains essential in order to find a solution to the situation in which the electoral process finds itself and to avoid an escalation of tension. The risk of violence for us is real, unless the political differences are resolved.

During his recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Secretary-General called on President Kabila, the Presidents of the two chambers of Parliament and members of the majority parties and civil society to engage constructively in a political dialogue that has the interests of the people at the centre. He highlighted the need to hold credible elections in line with the Constitution, with a view to consolidate the progress made in the country over the past decade. In that regard, we are working closely with the African Union and are supporting its efforts to facilitate a political dialogue with the support of regional and international partners.

Updating the voter rolls continues to be a key element in holding credible elections. Progress in that area will make it possible to lift one of the existing obstacles. The support of MONUSCO will be necessary in revising the voter lists. Nevertheless, to limit the risks involved in its involvement, securing political consensus beforehand is essential. That would contribute to overcoming numerous impediments and would mark a first, crucial step in the efforts aimed at ensuring the holding of credible elections.

(*spoke in English*)

Another key message conveyed by the Secretary-General during his visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo was that of the importance of there being sufficient space for political activities and the exercise of public liberties for the credibility of any electoral process. Reports of increasing restriction of the democratic space, in particular with regard to members of the opposition, the media and civil society, are of concern.

As set out in the report before the Council, the situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains highly complex, in particular in North Kivu and Ituri provinces, with the deterioration of the security situation in some areas. In the Beni area of North Kivu, the Allied Democratic Forces continue to carry out brutal attacks against civilians, the national security forces and MONUSCO. The Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and the myriad Mayi-Mayi groups in North Kivu also remain a significant threat to civilians. I am concerned in particular about the situation in southern Lubero and Walikale territories, where fighting between newly emerged Mayi-Mayi groups and FDLR units has resulted in mass displacements of civilians and heightened tensions between local communities, with an increasing number of human rights violations over recent months. The rhetoric by some actors has become increasingly strong, and there is a real risk of escalation intercommunal conflict.

The spate of kidnappings in areas formerly occupied by the Mouvement du 23 mars (M-23) in Masisi and Ituri territories is indicative of a lack of effective State presence in conflict-affected areas. Inter-ethnic tensions in Ituri province, fuelled by conflicts over land, large-scale displacements owing to the situation in North Kivu, and other population movements have again raised the possibility of serious violence in this area. Recent reported returns for former M-23 combatants to Masisi territory and other parts of the Kivus serve to underscore the urgent need to implement the Nairobi Declarations.

The situation in part of South Kivu also remains fragile. In mid-February, Congolese security services discovered weapons caches in the Ruzizi Plain, near Uvira. The subsequent arrests of several Congolese and Burundians on charges related to the caches and participation in an insurrection movement, as well as the remobilization of an ethnic militia in Haut Plateau, are signs that the clashes in Burundi could destabilize South Kivu.

MONUSCO has intensified efforts to approach the protection of civilians and the neutralization of armed groups as mission-wide priorities, with an added focus on non-military initiatives, including strong political advocacy, enhanced reporting and effective liaison with communities. MONUSCO has also begun developing tailored strategies to address the threat posed by armed groups. The Mission continues to work closely with Special Envoy Djinnit's Office with a view to dealing better with the regional aspects.

I would like to highlight the importance of renewing the partnership between the Government and MONUSCO if such threats are to be addressed more effectively. Since my arrival in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I have intensified my engagement with President Kabila himself, and he has indicated his willingness to enhance cooperation with MONUSCO and to re-engage in discussions on the joint development of an exit strategy for MONUSCO. President Kabila's commitment to renewing the coordination of military operations, which resulted in January in a technical agreement between the Government and MONUSCO and in the recent resumption of greater cooperation in planning operations, has paved the way for improved cooperation. That is important, as MONUSCO will be more effective if challenges can be addressed in a spirit of close cooperation with the Congolese authorities and of mutual trust and confidence.

Military cooperation offers a clear opportunity to significantly increase the military pressure on priority armed groups and protect civilians more effectively. The rate of surrender had risen in the past year, and that trend could continue in the coming months with a renewal of more coordinated military operations. A key priority for the coming year will be linking those efforts to a viable disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process in order to ensure that the military pressure leads to an eventual path to reintegration or repatriation. It will also be important to support those operations by managing weapons and explosives effectively. All United Nations support will be provided in accordance with the human-rights due-diligence policy. MONUSCO has put in place robust mitigating measures to ensure that our operations are able to effectively target armed groups while reducing the risk of human-rights abuses. The recent violence at the Kitona demobilization camp, which left two dead and several wounded, is a reminder of the need for careful planning and coordinated support for the return and reintegration of the more than 5,000 ex-combatants now in the national DDR programme. Coordinating advocacy for that phase of the programme with partners such as the World Bank will be a priority in the coming period.

The planned resumption of coordinated operations between the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and MONUSCO is an important part of a broader effort to renew and deepen our partnership with the Government, recognizing that a principled, transparent partnership is key to effective implementation of our mandate. MONUSCO and the Government took concrete steps in the context of the strategic dialogue aimed at developing an agreed exit strategy for MONUSCO, in line with resolution 2211 (2015) and taking into account the political and security realities on the ground. MONUSCO and the Government are discussing a framework for the exit strategy, laying out a conditions-based approach for the Mission's further drawdown and eventual withdrawal. Working groups have been established to develop agreed-on criteria for measuring progress in that regard, and have already been working on that for the past 10 days or so.

The process of force transformation is critical to establishing the conditions that will enable the Mission's drawdown and eventual withdrawal. Conducted effectively, that process will ensure that MONUSCO exercises greater operational capability in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, even as the force's overall numbers are gradually reduced. The core of the transformation is a more mobile and agile force based largely on the new rapid deployment battalions. The first of those arrived in the country last month and has already conducted rehearsal exercises. That approach, combined with increased aviation, surveillance and engineering capabilities, is designed to ensure enhanced responsiveness and the ability to implement a robust strategy for the protection of civilians in the coming period.

I would also like to take this opportunity to stress the priority I have personally made of fully implementing MONUSCO's zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse. The Mission has reviewed its overall strategy and introduced a new mechanism aimed at ensuring that such exploitation and abuse can be reported more easily, as well as a comprehensive network for responding to and assisting victims. Under my leadership, MONUSCO will take all possible steps to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, punish those responsible to the maximum extent possible and address the needs of victims and survivors.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight four issues for the Council to consider as it finalizes MONUSCO's new mandate.

First, we need a credible and meaningful political dialogue to overcome the impasse in the electoral process. A strong message on the need for political consensus and an agreed-on, sustainable way forward will be important, while at the same time emphasizing the link between a credible electoral process and support for fundamental human rights. It will also be particularly important to identify clear and realistic conditions under which the United Nations could support a revision of the voting registry, which we believe would help enhance the process's credibility and prevent the issue from becoming another obstacle to timely elections.

Secondly, I am optimistic that we can capitalize on the spirit of enhanced cooperation with the Government to make rapid progress on the priority armed groups, through improved cooperation between the Mission, the Government and the FARDC, and with the support of other partners. Neutralizing armed groups goes beyond military operations and will require improved efforts to extend the State's authority and find durable solutions for former combatants.

Thirdly, I count on the Council's support to the Secretary-General's recommendation to draw down an additional 1,700 military personnel. The recommendation takes into account the Mission's plans to transform the force and to take measures to address inefficiencies. Going on the projected capability and efficiency gains that the force transformation will bring, the assessment has been made that we can contemplate a further reduction in MONUSCO's military personnel without compromising the Mission's ability to implement its mandate to protect civilians, including by neutralizing armed groups. As outlined in the Secretary-General's letter of 16 December (S/2015/983) and the report before the Council today, the recommendation should be viewed as a concrete step forward in facilitating the strategic dialogue between the Mission and the Government, with a view to achieving a common goal — a gradual and progressive exit for MONUSCO that preserves the gains and investments made so far.

Fourthly, military pressure will result in a sustainable outcome only if there is an effective, well-planned and nationally led DDR process that ensures that ex-combatants are processed back into their communities or countries of origin, while also ensuring that hazardous war materials are removed and stabilization efforts intensified. The Government has begun planning for the reinsertion and reintegration of thousands of demobilized ex-combatants in their home communities, efforts that should be commended and built on.

(*spoke in French*)

Lastly, it will be important to recognize the progress made by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on ending the recruitment of children into the armed forces and implementing the national plan aimed at combating sexual violence. I would like to thank the members of the Council and all Member States for their continued active support to MONUSCO. I also want to express my appreciation to the staff of MONUSCO and the United Nations who work in difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The President: I thank Mr. Sidikou for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Minister Tshibanda N'Tungamulongo.

Mr. Tshibanda N'Tungamulongo (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to reiterate my congratulations to Angola for its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of March 2016. I also wish to reiterate how honoured we are to see the outstanding manner in which the friendly country of Angola is carrying out this task. I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me another opportunity to address the Council at this meeting focusing on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I wish also to take this opportunity to pay well-deserved tribute to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who has worked tirelessly over the past several years towards the restoration of peace in my country. Finally, once again I wish to express the gratitude of the people and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the efforts undertaken by the United Nations to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our country and to ensure its peace and stability.

Allow me, before continuing my statement, to condemn, on behalf of the President of the Republic, the Government and the Congolese people, the cowardly terrorist attacks that occurred recently in various places around the world, and in Brussels on 22 March. The Democratic Republic of the Congo extends its condolences to the Belgian Government, the Belgian people and the families and friends of the victims of this friendly country, as well as to those of all the other States affected by this scourge.

We just listened with great interest to the presentation of the report (S/2016/233) of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the report (S/2016/232) on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, delivered by Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. For clarification purposes, allow me to comment on some of the issues addressed in those reports, in particular those related to the progress in the electoral process, the security situation in the eastern part of my country, human rights, the strategic dialogue, including the reduction of the MONUSCO force, and the implementation of the commitments made by my country under the Addis Ababa framework agreement.

With regard to the electoral process, I would like to reaffirm before the Council that my country is committed to the organization of free elections in accordance with international standards of inclusiveness, transparency and credibility. However, my country also wishes to ensure that the elections are not marred by violence — before, during or after. Given the history of our country, the fragility of our institutions, the trauma experienced by our people and the heavy price paid by our economy due to armed conflicts as well as unruly social movements, the Democratic Republic of the Congo cannot put a price on peace and stability. They are our first priority. In that respect, and with specific regard to the cause and effect relationship between the elections and violence and instability, I affirm that there is no — not in absolute terms but in the specific context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo — empirical evidence that not holding or organizing elections on a given date has been, in itself, the cause of large-scale violence.

However, it should be recalled that, following the political intolerance and non-acceptance of the results by the defeated parties on the occasion of the 2006 and 2011 elections, my country experienced severe violence accompanied by a significant loss of human life and property. To avoid a recurrence of that situation, the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange, placed the country on the path of political dialogue so that, together, politicians from all sides, civil society, religious and customary authorities could agree on the ways and means to overcome the pitfalls found along the road to peaceful elections and to establish consensus on the current electoral process. There are four major pitfalls.

The first is the lack of a reliable and inclusive electoral register that takes into account all eligible Congolese voters, such as those newly of voting age, Congolese abroad and displaced persons and refugees who have returned to their place of residence. The organization of sound elections also requires the updating of voter lists, which must necessarily take into account the country's new administrative nomenclature stemming from the creation of new provinces, as well as the issuance of voting cards to all Congolese of voting age.

The second pitfall is the ongoing failure to establish a consensual and realistic timetable. The timetable issued at the time by the National Independent Electoral Commission was rendered non-operational after multiple discordant voices from the political class were heard.

The third pitfall concerns the securing of the electoral process in order to ensure the proper conduct of elections and the role politicians should play in the promotion of an environment that is conducive to a peaceful electoral process.

Finally, the fourth pitfall is the funding of the electoral process.

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo welcomes the invitation to participate in the dialogue among political actors launched by Pope Francis. My Government also welcomes the 16 February communiqué published jointly by the African Union, the European Union, the International Organization of la Francophonie and the United Nations, as well as the 24 February appeal by the Secretary-General, each of which insisted on the importance of that dialogue and called on all political actors in the country to fully cooperate with the duly appointed facilitator, former Prime Minister of Togo, Mr. Edem Kodjo, with a view to the consensual and timely preparation and organization of free, transparent and credible elections.

My Government has made considerable efforts in the fight against negative forces and armed groups. As evidenced by paragraph 5 of the report of the Secretary-General, the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) have led, and continue to conduct, operations against the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the Forces de résistance patriotiques en Ituri (FRPI). The operations will end only when all of those rebel movements have been eradicated.

However, remarkable results have already been recorded. As such, out of the 1,200 FDLR combatants estimated at the beginning of operations, today only 108 elements remain to be neutralized. And, even if we were to add to that figure the few FDLR elements that had once been returned to Rwanda before being recycled and re-injected into our country for the purpose of perpetuating insecurity and plundering the natural resources of our country, we are not facing a force that the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, supported by the United Nations, cannot overcome.

There is no more eloquent testimony on this subject than that of an individual who cannot be suspected of being soft on the matter, namely, the Defence Minister of the Republic of Rwanda, who, on 11 February 2015, in response to a question by an elected representative and member of the Rwandan Parliament's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Security, affirmed that the FDLR was no longer a military threat to Rwanda. That means that even the Rwandan authorities recognize the progress made towards neutralizing that negative force, even if, like them, we think that there is still some work to do.

Equally encouraging results have been seen in the fight against the ADF. Although it, too, has been reduced to a bare minimum, it remains a source of the most grave security concerns because of its established connection with certain Islamic groups and its terrorist actions, which, in just a few months, have led to the death, in atrocious conditions, of more than 500 Congolese men and women in the territory of Beni in North Kivu. Together with the FDLR and the FRPI, it is the main target of the operation that the FARDC will soon undertake with the support of MONUSCO.

I cannot leave this subject without mentioning that the 340 former combatants from the FDLR who had voluntarily surrendered last year, and their dependents, have been confined until today to the transit sites in Kisangani and Kanyabayonga. While thanking the United Nations for taking charge of those former combatants, my Government reiterates that it is the responsibility of the international community to repatriate them to Rwanda, their country of origin, or relocate them to a third country outside the Great Lakes region.

By setting up the National Human Rights Commission, on the one hand, and the Human Rights Liaison Entity, on the other hand, my country wished responsibly to send a strong signal of its steadfast determination to protect the rights of all its citizens, and even those of foreigners living on our territory, in accordance with national laws and international commitments.

The political space in the Democratic Republic of Congo is the most open of the entire region and it will remain so. Proof of that can be seen with the existence of more than 400 political parties and hundreds of private radio and television channels that freely set their editorial policy, many of which are owned by political actors known to be part of the opposition. Media oversight is constitutionally ensured by the Superior Council of Audiovisual and Communication, a democracy-supporting institution in which representatives from Congolese society in all its diversity sit. Further proof of the openness of the Congolese political space is the undeniable fact that, unlike some countries where being in the opposition means necessarily living outside the country, virtually all Congolese political leaders live in Congo, carry out their political activities, leave and return to the country without any restrictions related to their political opinions.

However, as in any constitutional State where the essential principles are the primacy of law and every citizen's equality before the law, public freedoms must be exercised in accordance with the law and by respecting the requirements of public order. And the State, guarantor of the freedoms and rights of all, has the duty to see to it that this is so, particularly in the light of the adage that states that the rights of one end where those of others begin. An individual's rights and freedoms do not permit him or her to defy with impunity the legal arsenal that protects the rights and safety of all. Therefore, when necessary, courts intervene, acting in an independent manner, to sanction, as in any constitutional State, offences committed.

Membership in the opposition, in the majority, in civil society or in the uniformed military does not release the perpetrator of an ordinary offence from responsibility. For a country like ours, whose population has greatly suffered from the impunity of the privileged due to their status or social standing, to be lenient in this area does not help to strengthen democracy, but rather to derail it. The same goes, necessarily, when serious violations of human rights or crimes against humanity are overlooked.

In response to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's legitimate request to begin the downsizing of MONUSCO, in recognition of the irrefutable progress made together with the United Nations over the past 17 years in terms of re-establishing peace and State authority, as well as in stabilizing the country's institutions, the Council had advocated for setting up a strategic dialogue between the Government and MONUSCO with a view to working together to develop an orderly exit strategy that ensures that the gains made will be preserved. Thanks to MONUSCO's new leadership and the personal recommendations of the Secretary-General, the strategic dialogue between the Government and MONUSCO, which was interrupted in the last quarter of 2015, resumed about a month ago in a constructive spirit.

After a series of meetings at the political level that helped lay the foundations for consensus on the principles and main lines of the exit strategy, a joint working group made up of experts from the Government and MONUSCO met from 9 to 19 March, with the major task of defining objective and realistic criteria for assessing the situation in the geographic areas where MONUSCO personnel are deployed, from the dual perspective of safety and the requirements of stabilization, on the one hand, and the drafting, in a second phase, of a road map for an orderly and gradual withdrawal of MONUSCO from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on the other hand. I am pleased to report that, at this stage, the following important results have already been recorded.

First, a withdrawal strategy paper has been drafted and is in the final stages of completion.

Secondly, based on the principles agreed in the paper, the experts completed the first phase of their work by setting forth in a memorandum, signed by the Government and MONUSCO on 21 March, the current deployment arrangement of the MONUSCO contingents region by region, the criteria to be used to evaluate the situation on the ground, the remaining pending threats and challenges, ongoing actions or those expected to be undertaken by the Government to deal with the threats and challenges and, in each case, the specific MONUSCO assistance expected in support of the Government. Specific recommendations permit this joint exercise. I would like to appeal to the Council to make sure that this essential exercise, which it requested and to which the Government is committed in good faith and which is making progress in a satisfactory way in a spirit of trust re-established between the parties, does not remain a dead letter.

With regard to the renewal of the mandate of MONUSCO, which is scheduled to take place at the end of this month, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo hopes that the Council will take into account the progress in the strategic dialogue and the need to maintain between the two parties to the dialogue an environment that is conducive to its continuation, in particular in its next phase, which will be devoted to developing a road map for the orderly and definitive withdrawal of MONUSCO from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would underscore that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is aware of the actions expected of it in order to make the withdrawal irreversible and to accelerate its pace, particularly in terms of security sector reform. Measures are currently being taken so that the three battallions of the rapid reaction force that is being developed within the FARDC, which have already been trained, equipped and successfully deployed on the ground, in particular in the course of operations against the ADF and FDLR, will be further bolstered within a few months by other units, which will make possible the assumption of full responsibility for all needs for securing the eastern part of the country. That is a very ambitious goal, to contribute to creating the concrete conditions that will make possible by the end of this year the withdrawal of half of the MONUSCO contingent currently deployed on our territory without undermining security and the stabilization of the country.

We call on those who continue to oppose the people and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to look closely at the political and security situation, as well as the required responses, particularly with regard to the role of MONUSCO. The Council has embraced changing the operational concept of the Mission by giving preference to strengthening its capacity for projection rather than simply focusing on the number of personnel. In the spirit of partnership that is supposed to be at the heart of our relationship, we hope, as part of the efforts of the Government to achieve the established goal of reduction, that we can count on the support, without any ulterior agenda, of the members of the Council so that we can, within a reasonable time frame, celebrate together the successful completion of the largest peacekeeping operation in the world.

My country's Government deplores the slowness in the implementation of one of the important provisions of the Nairobi Declarations, namely, the repatriation of ex-combattants of Mouvement du 23-Mars (M-23). The slow pace is due mainly to bad faith on the part of the leadership of the M-23. It should be recalled that, following the military defeat of M-23, those combatants from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other countries fled to Uganda and Rwanda. According to the amnesty law, only those from the Democratic Republic of the Congo are eligible for amnesty. Upon application of the law, 970 citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo who are former combattants of the M-23 who were not guilty of war crimes or crimes against humanity were granted amnesty by the Government. Of that number only 208 were repatriated from Uganda to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

According to the latest ultimatum, of 15 December 2015, of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region for the unconditional repatriation to the Democratic Republic of the Congo of all former Congolese combatants of the M-23 still cantonned in Uganda were rejected by the leadership of the M-23. Only 13 former combatants responded to that appeal and accepted repatriation. That makes a total of 221 former M-23 combattants repatriated from Uganda since December 2014. Based on that, it is possible to assert that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is the only signatory country to the Nairobi Declarations that is implementing them. The M-23 former combatants, taken hostage by their leadership, still have not accepted to be part of the repatriation exercise.

My Government therefore believes that the Council should consider sanctions against the M-23 leaders, who are holding the former combattants of the Movement hostage and preventing their repatriation, and hence their social reintegration in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in accordance with the decision taken in New York on 29 September 2015 by the Heads of States signatories of the framework agreement at the sixth high-level meeting of the Regionl Oversight Mechanism of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. As far as the countries that have hosted the former rebels, it is also very important to put pressure on them to have them meet their commitments and facilitate repatriation.

I cannot conclude my statement without expressing the gratitude of my Government to Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and to Mr. Said

Djinnit, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, for their commitment and devotion to the cause of my country and to the Great Lakes region. To all member of the Security Council, I reiterate my country's full recognition and gratitude.

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.

United Nations

S/PV.7655

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7655th meeting

Thursday, 24 March 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Gaspar Martins	(Angola)
Members:	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rossselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia (S/2016/27)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia (S/2016/27)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Somalia to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/273, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Angola, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Uruguay.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/27, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on Somalia.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2275 (2016).

The meeting rose at 10.10 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7656

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7656th meeting

Thursday, 24 March 2016, 10.10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Gaspar Martins	(Angola)
Members:	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rossselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Note by the President (S/2016/157)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Non-proliferation/Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Note by the President (S/2016/157)

The President: The Council shall now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/274, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by the United States.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/157, which contains a note by the President.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2276 (2016).

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7657

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7657th meeting

Thursday, 24 March 2016, 10.15 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Gaspar Martins	(Angola)
Members:	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rossselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

In now give the floor to Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: The past month has been marked by some of the bloodiest incidents in the current wave of violence throughout Israel and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. On 8 March, a 28-year-old American graduate student, Taylor Force, was killed in Jaffa during a vicious stabbing spree by a Palestinian that left a dozen Israelis and several tourists wounded. Less than an hour before that, two Israeli police officers were seriously wounded in a shooting attack near Jerusalem's Old City, while at almost the same time an Israeli man was stabbed in an attack outside Tel Aviv. Thankfully he survived. Israeli security forces killed the Palestinian perpetrators in the first two incidents, while in the third the attacker was reportedly killed by his own knife in a struggle with his intended victim.

Six months into this latest round of violence, which has killed 30 Israelis and 198 Palestinians, with most of the Palestinians killed while reportedly carrying out knife, gun or car-ramming attacks, it is time that the international community move beyond mere condemnations of such acts of terror and violence. It is time to send a clear message to both parties. To the Palestinian people we need to say clearly: stabbing someone in the street will not bring about a Palestinian State, and neither will praising and glorifying violence in the media. Those radicals determined to poison the minds of Palestinian youth must recognize their central role in the slow evisceration of the dream of Palestinian statehood. By the same token, we must also be very clear, and Israel should understand that building more walls and increasing administrative detentions, punitive demolitions and movement restrictions are all actions that breed anger among people who feel that they are being collectively humiliated, punished and discriminated against.

Heavy-handed responses play into the hands of extremists, undermine moderate voices and further deepen the gulf between the two sides. Six months after the initial upsurge of violence, it remains blatantly clear that security measures alone will not contain the forces that are perpetuating the violence. Israelis and Palestinians must at long last face the stark realities that continue to drive the violence and hold the two-State solution hostage. First and foremost, that means both sides actively taking steps that demonstrate their commitment to, and create the conditions for, an eventual return to negotiations to achieve a viable Palestinian State and ensure Israel's long-term security.

We in the international community must also be clear both in our understanding of the conflict and our role in how to help resolve it. Our immediate priority must be ending the violence that is tearing Israelis and Palestinians apart when both face the rise of radicals among their own constituents. We only need to look at the rest of the region to see the dangers of religious extremism, sectarianism and terrorism. But let us also be abundantly clear that the current security challenges cannot be addressed if we lose sight of the fundamental problems that have led us here, namely, the persistent inability to achieve a just and lasting solution that meets the national aspirations of the Palestinians and Israelis and allows them to live in two States, side-by-side and in peace, security and mutual recognition. That is why today we must once again play an important role by saying that the prospect of a two-State solution is not dead and that it remains the best pathway for peace.

The time has come however to sound the alarm that the two-State solution is slipping from our fingers and that it is disappearing as the realities on the ground — driven by ongoing settlement activities and confiscation of Palestinian land, as well as the ongoing lack of genuine Palestinian unity — make the prospect of a viable and independent Palestinian State less possible and less likely. The time has come for us to speak clearly with regard to the risks that undermine the two-State solution, but also point to the way to a return to meaningful negotiations. That is why the Secretary-General, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United States of America, all of whom are members of the Middle East Quartet, have stepped up their efforts to break the political impasse.

The Quartet envoys have started their work on a report that will review the situation on the ground, identify the dangers facing a two-State solution and provide recommendations on the way forward. We remain seriously concerned that current trends — including continued acts of violence against civilians, incitement, ongoing settlement activity and the high rate of demolitions of Palestinian structures — are dangerously imperilling the viability of a two-State solution.

And yet while the international community explores avenues for constructive engagement, there are trends that raise questions about the commitment of the parties to seriously address the main challenges blocking progress towards peace.Israel's settlement enterprise continues, despite broad international condemnation. In a particularly troubling development, on 10 March, Israel classified 580 acres south of the city of Jericho, in the West Bank, as so called State land. The area includes the reported approval of 378 acres, which was widely condemned in January. That is evidence of an ongoing Israeli policy of systematic consolidation of its control of the occupied West Bank in direct contravention of international law. Since the early 1980s, Israeli authorities in the West Bank have adopted — based on a controversial interpretation of the Ottoman Land Code — a policy of declaring land that is not otherwise registered as private as State land. That has resulted in the State seizing control over certain areas where Palestinians claim ownership and has proved to be a precursor for settlement construction. Any such declaration, particularly of a large scale, raises justified concerns over further settlement expansion. Settlements are illegal under international law, and I urge Israel to halt and reverse such decisions.

The demolition and confiscation of Palestinian structures across the West Bank has also surged in 2016, with 468 houses and other structures demolished since the beginning of the year. On 23 March, Israeli authorities demolished 53 structures in Khirbet Tana, including 22 homes, the third demolition this year in that community because Israel has declared the area a firing zone. The total number of structures demolished or confiscated in the first 12 weeks of 2016 has now reached 85 per cent of the total number demolished or confiscated for all of 2015. As Palestinians are consistently denied permits to build legally, residents in the affected areas are left with few options but to build without permits, leaving them in constant fear of their homes and livelihoods being destroyed. I urge Israel to respect international humanitarian law and cease such unfair and unjust planning processes in the West Bank.

Allow me to turn briefly to political developments on the Palestinian front. Achieving genuine Palestinian unity on the basis of non-violence, democracy and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) principles would constitute a crucial building block for the foundation of a Palestinian State. The formation of a national unity Government that abides by the PLO programme and the holding of long-overdue elections are important elements of that process. Sadly, we are nowhere near that goal, since recent discussions between Palestinian factions in Qatar have yet to yield any agreement. I strongly encourage the factions not to squander this important opportunity to reach a consensus that can enable the advancement of long-term Palestinian national goals as well as near-term fiscal and development goals for the Palestinian people.

I take this opportunity to welcome the suspension, on 12 March, of the month-long Palestinian teachers' strike, following President Abbas's commitment to fully implementing a 2013 trade union deal that gives them a 10 per cent salary increase. I also note that, on 10 March, a Fatah member of the Palestine Legislative Committee ended her 18-day sit-in at the Parliament building after the Attorney General cancelled an arrest order against her that had been issued after she had raised allegations of corruption. Such allegations must be duly investigated.

Turning to Gaza, the security situation remains volatile, as a number of factors continue to produce a highly combustible environment. Despite a relative pause over the past month, the past weeks saw five rockets fired from Gaza to Israel. In response, on 12 March, Israel conducted four air strikes, in which two Palestinian children, Israa and Yassin Abu Khusa, were tragically killed. Such incidents point to the fragile nature of the current ceasefire. I call on all the Palestinian factions in Gaza to uphold the current ceasefire, which is vital to the Strip's recovery.

The Reconstruction Mechanism continues to enable the purchase of materials for rebuilding and doing critical repairs to homes in Gaza that were damaged or destroyed in 2014. Unfortunately, the reconstruction of homes that were completely destroyed continues to be painfully slow, largely due to the slow disbursement of donor pledges. I strongly encourage all Member States that have not done so to make their disbursements without delay. Failure to comprehensively address the chronic problems affecting Gaza risks another escalation in the future.

To touch on Lebanon, on 16 March the Security Council was briefed by Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Special Coordinator of the Secretary-General for Lebanon. The Secretary-General welcomed the Council's subsequent press statement reaffirming its united support for Lebanon's stability and State institutions. The Secretary-General is currently on a two-day visit to Lebanon together with the President of the World Bank. The visit in itself illustrates the strong commitment of the United Nations and the international community to helping Lebanon address the multiple challenges it faces as a result of the Syrian crisis.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that there can be no peace without hope. But fostering hope requires courageous leadership that is willing to articulate a clear political horizon. It requires moving beyond unilateral actions and ending the policy of eternal management of the shifting status quo, and a commitment to improving the dynamics on the ground with the genuine aim of reaching a negotiated two-State solution, which still remains the stated goal of both sides. The obstacles are certainly many, but none of them are insurmountable.

People often say that the lack of trust between the parties precludes any advance towards peace. Re-establishing that trust and laying the foundations for a peaceful resolution must of course remain our collective focus, but change unquestionably requires the political will of the parties. Without it, Palestinians and Israelis will continue to face an uncertain and dangerous future as the violent and unpredictable tectonics of the Middle East continue to shift around them.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.